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THE
SMOKE-
EATERS

HARVEY-J-O'HIGGINS

Stanford University Memorial Fund



In tribute to

Barbara Jane Kegel

from a gift by

Mrs. Vincent Y. Bowditch

Wabel E. Christie,

April 5, 05,



THE SMOKE-EATERS



"THERE WAS A FLASH OF FIRE AT THE HORSES' HEADS"





1

2

3

THE
SMOKE-EATERS
THE STORY OF A FIRE CREW

BY
HARVEY J. O'HIGGINS

"So yuh want to be a fireman, eh?
Huh! Can yuh 'eat smoke'? an' get
fat on 'stife'?" — SERGEANT FIM.



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TO
Lieutenant E. D. J.
OF THE NEW YORK FIRE DEPARTMENT

Here is a book about our old friends the captain and the crew of Hook and Ladder Company No. —, with incidents that are taken from the Manhattan Bank fire, from the burning of the bark Criffel, from your own adventure with "that kike, the fire-bug," and from a dozen other fires and truck-house dramas which you will recognize and recollect. Do you know how much of this book owes its being to you — to you and your experience and your inexhaustible good-nature? I know that whatever there is in it of truth to life, of accuracy in detail, of honesty in point of view, is due, Lieutenant, to yourself.

When you shall come to sit, like Captain Meaghan, "a gentleman of leisure," — retired on the pension which you have already earned a hundred times over by the saving of others' lives and the risking of your own, — may this volume recall to you the years of your most dangerous campaigning. May it represent to you, now, the gratitude of that hard-driven "newspaper tout" who came to you so often to draw you out of a modest reticence with "fool questions;" and may it carry to a larger audience than you had in him some appreciation of the burly life of those "blue-shirted figger-jumpers" who live face to face with the very scorch of death, "eat smoke and spit black buttons," and accept the call of an heroic duty as the merest bread-and-butter matter of their every day.

H. J. O'H.



CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE "RED-INK SQUAD"	3
II. A CHARGE OF COWARDICE	33
III. ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE	65
IV. PRIVATE MORPHY'S ROMANCE	96
V. IN THE NATURE OF A HERO	119
VI. CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION	148
VII. TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS	172
VIII. A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT	222
IX. A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT	248
X. NOT FOR PUBLICATION	280

THE SMOKE - EATERS





THE SMOKE - EATERS

I

THE " RED - INK SQUAD "

WHEN the new chief took charge of the uniformed force of the fire department, he swept its veterans into retirement with a broom. The " probationers " crowded in to fill the vacancies, and in three months Captain Meaghan found himself, as he said, sourly, " teachin' kindergarten " in the truck-house of Hook and Ladder Company No. 0. He ruled a shabby red-brick building of three stories that stood between the knees of two down-town wholesale houses in a warehouse district where " packing-case fires " gave the men the worst of " punishment " and the best of training. It followed

THE SMOKE - EATERS

that the captain's roll had more probationers and new men on it than any other; and because the names of the probationers were entered in red ink, these raw recruits were nicknamed, in contempt, the "red-ink squad."

They were teased and bullied by the older men. They quarrelled among themselves, disturbing the club quiet of the truck-house leisure; and they were despised by their captain, who demanded of his new assistant, "Where'll I be if I run into a big blaze with a gang like that?"

He spoke as if he held Lieutenant Gallagher personally responsible for the condition of the crew. Gallagher tried to flatter him with an assurance that the chief sent the green men to him as a good master. "There's Brodrick has the same sort of district," he said, "and he doesn't get them."

Captain Meaghan replied, curtly: "He breaks their backs."

THE "RED - INK SQUAD"

Gallegher rubbed his chin. "They're not so bad, taking them singly," he considered, "but there's too many of them. And those two Guinnys were a double dose too much." (He referred to two Italians, — one of whom was called "Dan Jordan" by the men, because his name was "Giovanni Giordano" and he was good-natured; and the other was maliciously miscalled "Spaghetti," because his name was unpronounceable, and he turned black when he got this substitute.)

"They'll be sendin' me Chinese next," Captain Meaghan growled, unmollified.

"They will," the lieutenant said, "as soon as the Chinks begin to vote."

Captain Meaghan chose to resent that shot at the powers that ruled the department. "Well," he blustered, "I wish yuh'd get into a 'worker,' so's if yuh're the stuff that makes firemen I'd know it; an' if y' ain't, the chief'd know it — an' cut it out."

And he had his wish.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

The alarm of the Torrance fire was rung in just before daybreak on a warm midsummer morning, while the men still lay sleeping in their bunk-room under the glowworm glimmer of a lowered gas-jet. They leaped from their cots with the simultaneous suddenness of the start in an obstacle race at the crack of the pistol, tugged on their "turn-outs" of rubber boots and trousers with a muttering of growls and imprecations, vaulted beds while still hooking their waistband catches, threw themselves at the brass sliding-poles in the corners, and shot down into the glare and noise and seeming disorder of the ground floor, where the horses were already tossing their great heads in their harness, and the driver was already bending forward in his seat, and the doors stood open on the darkness of the night.

Captain Meaghan sprang into the light rig in which the absent battalion chief rode to fires, and swung out into the street with

THE "RED - INK SQUAD "

a sudden clatter of hoofs on the stone sidewalk and the burst and echo of a jangling gong in the dead quiet out-of-doors. The truck followed — fifteen seconds after the "jigger" had started the alarm — with little "Spaghetti" climbing in over the tail of the bed-ladders behind "Long Tom" Donnelly, who had the "tiller" of the hind wheels.

That was a good start. But it was only the start. The driver was a new man, who was not new to driving, but who *was* new to driving a hook-and-ladder truck. He had been a coachman, and he knew all about horses; but for the seat of a five-ton truck a man needs the nerve of a *chauffeur* and the shoulders of a Roman chariot-racer; and he does not need to know a bridle from a belly-band. The new man had the nerve, but he lacked the shoulders. And before they had rounded their second corner, Donnelly, on the tiller, was braced and ready for the turn at

THE SMOKE - EATERS

a gallop that might be a run on the rocks for *him*.

It came within sight of the fire. The horses were already beyond control when the piping wail of a " steamer " sounded in their ears from a side street; the driver tugged and shouted; three white horses with a shining engine leaped out of the darkness ahead of them, and Donnelly, with a great oath, wrenched the wheel of his tiller around to send the rear of the hook-and-ladder truck swinging for a lamp-post on the curb. The crash broke the rear running-gear, and brought down the truck on the cobblestones, hamstrung. The engine flashed past them, dropping fire.

The collision had been averted, but little " Spaghetti " had been thrown out on the stone pavement, and lay curled up on a sidewalk grating with a broken body. Donnelly crawled out from the ladders, his right arm hanging limp. The other men were unhurt.

THE "RED - INK SQUAD"

They had braced themselves against the shock by clinging to the side ladders; and, moreover, they had not received the terrific momentum of the full swing. They were on their feet about the fallen "nigh" horse when Lieutenant Gallegher called out to them to follow him on foot with such scaling-ladders, hooks, and axes as they could carry; and they stormed the truck for tools. Donnelly and "Dan Jordan" lifted "Spaghetti" between them and carried him to a bed of life-lines covered with a coat. The crew disappeared around the corner, running heavily in their rubber boots. "Be off now," Donnelly ordered the Italian, and "Dan Jordan" followed the others reluctantly, looking back at his unconscious countryman as he turned into the side street.

Now, the first truck company to arrive at a fire makes an entrance at doors and win-

THE SMOKE - EATERS

dows, and incidentally saves whatever lives are in danger; the second forces its way through an adjoining building to open smoke-vents in the roof; the third is scattered wherever its assistance is most needed, to help the engine crews in "stretching in" new lines of hose, to tear down burning woodwork, to carry ladders and wield forcible-entrance tools in the secondary movements which are made against a fire after its position has been developed. The accident which wrecked Gallegher's truck brought up Company No. 0, the third crew to arrive where it should have been the first. And that was how the probationers came to be separated from their elders, to face their trial in a body and alone.

Captain Meaghan was already raging at the disgrace which their delay brought to him, and the danger which it brought to the first unsupported engine companies that had gone in against the fire. When he saw his

THE " RED - INK SQUAD "

men straggling in afoot, disordered, winded, and trailing their few tools, he threw his helmet at his feet and kicked it, cursing, into the gutter. The new men gathered behind Gallegher and the front line of the company's old guard, and waited like schoolboys for a disciplining, with muttered asides to one another which they spoke with their eyes on their feet. Pipemen shouldered through them, dragging hose. A water-tower almost ran them down. Shout answered shout around them. And when they looked up for their orders, Captain Meaghan stood bare-headed and raving before them, shaking an impotent fist at Gallegher and roaring unreportable abuse.

Gallegher picked up his helmet for him from the gutter. The captain took it roughly and shambled off with it in his hand to report to the chief.

The lieutenant was known as the mildest-mannered man that ever " rolled " to a fire.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“ Much more like this,” he said, “ and the old man’ll blow up and bust.”

Sergeant Pim, who was biting a cud of tobacco from a companion’s plug, rolled the morsel, bulging, in his lean cheek. He had no consolation to offer, so he gave the remainder of Parr’s tobacco; and Gallegher accepted it with a mute nod of thanks. The occasion was plainly past words.

The Torrance Building before them was nine stories in height, a structure of granite pillars and red brick, used as a wholesale house by a chemical company on the ground floor, and as an office building in the upper stories. The fire was in the lower part of it. Already the “ deadlights ” in the sidewalk had been broken in with axes and mauls, and a cellar pipe was spouting its stream through the opening into the basement. Long lines of hose stretched from doors and hung from windows where the smoke puffed from gaping sashes, and men in

THE "RED - INK SQUAD "

helmets and rubber coats appeared for a moment to shout reports into the disorder below them and vanish again in the darkness. The roof of the seven-story building adjoining was alive with men who were raising ladders to the burning structure. It did not seem to Gallagher and his company that there would be much for No. 0 to do. They waited — the inglorious reserve in a battle which they should have led — in the smoking turmoil of pulsing engines, the cry of orders, and the hurry of men.

They were roused from their inaction by Captain Meaghan, who charged down on them like a dog on chickens, and sent them scurrying in all directions, — chased Lieutenant Gallagher, Sergeant Pim, and two probationers, Morphy and Fuchs, to the ladders with a shout to open smoke-vents throughout the upper stories; ordered three of the old men into the basement, with a whack of his helmet on their shoulders and

THE SMOKE - EATERS

a yell at their heels, to aid the pipemen who were flooding the cellar; thrust aside two others who carried axes, shouting at them, " You come after me; " sent Parr, " Dan Jordan, " and a probationer named Doyle up the ladders after Gallegher's squad; and then crushed his mudded helmet down on his head and raced with the axemen for the ground floor, where a line of hose trailed from the black smoke of the doorway.

That disposition of his men put the veterans of the company where they were most needed — in the cellar and on the first floor — to fight the fire at the fierce root of it, and it sent all the probationers aloft, in charge of Lieutenant Gallegher, to the less important and less dangerous duty of opening smoke-vents. It is with these " red-inkers " only that we are concerned. How the men in the cellar were driven back by the poisonous fume of burning chemicals, fighting in a water that was knee-deep, and in a smoke

THE " RED - INK SQUAD "

that stuck like sulphur in the lungs; how the flames got behind Captain Meaghan and the two men with him, and cut off their retreat from the burning ground floor; how they were rescued by their comrades and taken unconscious to the hospital in the waiting ambulances, — all this may not be told here. These were merely the trials of a valor that had been proved many times in fires not less difficult and dangerous. With the probationers it was a different story.

While the battle below them was being fought and lost, they carried out their captain's orders to aid and relieve the engine companies manning the streams in the upper stories. They worked their way from the front to the rear of the building, and threw open the steel shutters of the back windows to let in the air and to let out the smoke. They found the pipemen fighting the vanguard of the fire that was coming up the

THE SMOKE - EATERS

elevator shaft. The blaze here was not dangerously large; the heat was not excessive. The only menace was the smoke; and Gallagher, with good judgment, cried on his little squad against it. Being without scaling-ladders, they used the stairs, and worked with axe and hook-butt from the third story to the sixth, crashing down doors and beating out window-sashes until they had a clean chimney-flue for the smoke that had been stifling the pipemen on the floors below.

They were on the sixth story, ignorant of what had been happening on the ground floor, when an explosion of "back-draft" below alarmed them. Gallagher had supposed that the fire was well under control by this time; he had not known of the poisonous fume in the smoke. And the magnitude of the explosion indicated a greater accumulation of gas, and therefore a fiercer flame and a greater area of heat, than he had imagined.

THE " RED - INK SQUAD "

He ran to a window and hung out of it to see men sliding down the ladders from the second story. A huge flame spat out from the ground floor; and he knew from the retreat and counter-rush, the scurry and confusion of the crews in the street, that the fire was carrying all below him, and that his escape would be cut off. He bawled down to warn them of his danger, and then ordered his squad to follow him by the stairs. They groped their way back through the dark passages, only to come on the deadly smoke which was pouring up stairs and elevator shaft in advance of an unchecked fire. A puff of it struck them like a hand at the throat, and they dropped to the floor to catch the low draft of cleaner air which is always to be found there. It was impossible to go forward. Gallegher led them back at a blundering run to the window.

One look below convinced him that they were trapped. It was not possible for the

THE SMOKE - EATERS

men in the street to put up ladders to them. They themselves, because of the accident to their truck, were without scaling-ladders or other means of escape.

“ We’re up a tree,” Gallegher said, soberly.

The new men, panting from exertion and excitement, and coughing from the irritation of the smoke in their throats, grew suddenly quiet, staring blankly at the lieutenant and at one another. They looked out at the street, five stories below them, obscured in a belch of smoke. They heard the flames behind them singing in a fierce undertone in the elevator shaft. And when the Italian, “ Dan Jordan,” began to jabber an appeal to all the saints to save him — which the men mistook for a “ Dago ” profanity — they relieved their feelings in oaths of bewilderment and disgust.

Sergeant Pim had been too busy to remember the quid in his cheek. Now he

THE "RED-INK SQUAD"

chewed thoughtfully. "If we could crawl back an' go higher," he suggested, "there ought to be a crew on the roof."

"There's something in that smoke," Gallegher said. "Cellar and first floor's full of drugs — chemical company. They're trying to get out the men down there. They're too blame busy to do anything for us."

Fuchs, the probationer, who had been a bridge-worker, got out on the window-ledge and craned his neck.

"Too far to jump," Lieutenant Gallegher warned him.

"Sure," he said, "but here's a three-inch ledge that ought to run to the next building."

A few feet below the window-sill there was a projecting strip of ornamental stone facing that crossed the Torrance Building with a stripe of gray on the red-brick front. Pim looked down at it.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“ Think we’re giddy sparrows? ” he complained.

“ Dan Jordan ” peeped out, and fell back from the window, waving an unintelligible protest.

Fuchs drew off his rubber boots. “ If you’ll put a hand ’tween my shoulders,” he said to Gallegher, “ I’ll see how far it goes.”

The lieutenant answered: “ Yes. Wait a second. Knock that sash in, Parr.”

Parr made a sashless gap of the window-frame with two blows of his axe. Fuchs swung over the sill, with Gallegher’s hand in his collar, and found the stone ledge with his toes. “ All right,” he said. “ Brace yourself to hold me to the wall — and let me get as far as you can.”

Gallegher straddled the sill — with Parr sitting on the leg that anchored him to the room — and gave Fuchs an arm’s length, with a great palm spread between the probationer’s shoulders. Fuchs edged forward,

THE "RED - INK SQUAD "

his ear scraping the bricks, until he could be certain that the ledge led to the windows of the next building. " All right," he said, evenly; " it's a long stretch, but I guess we can do it," and came back inch by inch. " This ledge joins a sort of cornice."

Gallegher turned to the others. " You do by each other what I do with Fuchs," he said. " Morphy'll follow me, and then Jordan, and then Doyle and Pim. Parr, you'll have to anchor us here till Fuchs reaches the other window. Get your boots off, men. You'll have to get a grip with your toes."

" I got holes in my stockings," Pim said, coyly.

The men laughed — all but " Dan Jordan." The accident to his chum " Spaghetti " had first broken his nerve; the blind groping in the darkness and the smoke, through an endless succession of bewildering passageways and offices, with a fire that

THE SMOKE - EATERS

seemed to him to be stalking them into the dangerous upper regions of the burning building, had added a child's fear to this weakness; the attempt to escape through the choking smoke, and the sudden realization of all his worst fears when that attempt had failed, had put him in a panic terror; and now, when he saw Gallegher's preparations to climb out on a ledge that no man could cling to, he lost his last control of himself, ran to the other window of the room, and screamed wildly out of it, " Hel-l-lp-ah! Hel-l-lp-ah! "

His voice cut through the uproar in the street with the shrill sharpness of a steam whistle. He began to yell a frightened gibberish in a voice of crazy fear.

Parr's hand closed suddenly on his throat, choked him from behind, and threw him back from the window, to fall in a hysteric grovel on the floor. " There's a blamed fine mess," Parr said to Gallegher.

THE "RED-INK SQUAD"

The lieutenant was thinking of the effect of it on the new men. He prodded Jordan with his toe. "Get up," he said, sternly.

The Italian covered his head with his hands, and wailed in his jargon. Gallegher kicked him in the side. "Get up," he ordered. "Get up out of that."

Jordan rolled away from him in a paroxysm of terror. The lieutenant bent down, caught his hand in the probationer's collar, and, raising him to his knees, shook and strangled him till he gasped for breath. "Get up," he said, easing his hold on him.

The Italian sprang to his feet, broke from the lieutenant, and ran toward the window, screaming. Parr grappled with him. He fought like a madman, with wild blows that fell on Parr's face and blinded him so that he loosed his hold to defend himself; and the Italian, slipping through his arms, jumped to the sill of the window. He crouched there

THE SMOKE - EATERS

a moment, huddled up with fear, and then — whether it was that he lost his balance, or that he had been really driven out of his mind by this “ fire fright ” — just as Parr caught at his legs, he uttered a last frantic cry, and dived headlong into the street.

They saw him fall, spread like a bat. Gallegher, with a roar of “ Get back there ! ” drove the probationers from the windows before they saw the rest.

He faced them. Morphy’s lips were trembling. Doyle was laughing weakly. Parr wiped his forehead with a grimy hand. The lieutenant said, in a low voice: “ That’s what happens when a man loses his head.”

The noises from the street grew in their silence, until Fuchs, on the ledge outside the window, said, reflectively: “ That’s like Mullen did on the old cantilever.” And Gallegher knew from his manner that he could depend on one of the probationers at least.

THE "RED - INK SQUAD"

He tried to encourage the others. "And there was no need for it," he said. "There's no danger about getting out of here—not a bit. The same thing's been done before. There was Rush did it—for the matter of that—at the Manhattan bank fire. . . . Get your wind, now. There's no hurry."

"No; what's the use of hurryin'?" Pim said, grimly. "Jordan's beat us down already."

Morphy shuddered. He felt sick and weak; he flushed hot and went cold in waves; and his knees melted into tremblings. He leaned against the wall. Doyle laughed brokenly at Pim.

"Pull yourselves together, now," Gallagher said; and the probationer's laugh choked in a catch of breath that was somewhere between a gulp and a sob.

The lieutenant summed them up in a glance. "Just do what I tell you," he instructed

THE SMOKE - EATERS

them, "and don't be thinking of what *might* happen. Keep your eyes off *that*. See?"

A puff of smoke warned him of approaching danger. He turned to the window and climbed out on the sill. "We've got our hands full," he said to Fuchs. "And if either of those men goes dizzy, we'll all go down."

He lowered himself to a place on the narrow ledge. Fuchs, then, with Gallagher's arm to support him, edged out against the wall. The lieutenant made room on the ledge for the next comer. "Morphy," he said.

Morphy came trembling over the sill, with his teeth shut on his nervousness. "Put your hand between my shoulders," Gallagher ordered, ignoring the man's condition, "and let me and Fuchs go forward as far as you can."

Morphy said, "Yes, sir," gratefully.

The two leaders edged forward. "Pim's next," Gallagher said.

THE "RED - INK SQUAD"

With Pim in position, the chain stretched itself inch by inch across the wall. The noises from the street beat up at them like the sound of surf at the foot of a cliff to which they were clinging.

"A few feet more'll do it," Fuchs reported.

Gallegher knew that he could not depend on Doyle. Morphy was frightened, but his pride tried to conceal it, whereas Doyle had laughed at his own weakness; and Gallegher knew enough of the psychology of fear to rate this last hysteria near the breakdown. "Parr next," he ordered.

"Parr next," Morphy repeated, huskily.

"You're next," Pim said, in the cheerful voice of a barber to his customer. "Billy, if you loves me, hold me close."

Parr spat on his hands, and lowered himself to the ledge. The men moved forward — Doyle in the window, holding Parr; Parr supporting Pim; Pim holding Morphy to the

THE SMOKE - EATERS

wall with an arm of iron; Morphy crushing Gallegher's broad shoulders with a pressure that spoke of overtense nerves; Gallegher, steadying Fuchs, and waiting quietly for the first signs of collapse in the man behind him. The smoke stung in their nostrils. The bricks scratched their perspiring faces. Their heels stood on nothing; and the cords of their insteps ached with the strain of their weight.

"My knees are gettin' weak," Morphy said, hoarsely.

No one answered him. Fuchs was still going forward, and Gallegher's hand slid heavily across the little bridge-worker's back as they stretched their link of the chain to the breaking point. The lieutenant felt his fingers pass from the hollow of the probationer's shoulders to the ridge of his shoulder-blade — felt that drawn slowly under his palm — felt the ball of his thumb slipping over the shoulder.

THE "RED - INK SQUAD "

There was a crash of broken glass. " Got my hold," Fuchs reported.

He passed beyond Gallegher's reach, and they could hear him beating in the glass of the window with his hatchet. He came back to put a hand behind Gallegher. The lieutenant changed the strain to his other arm.

" All right, now," he said to Morphy. " Fuchs' got me. You hold up Pim. Tell Doyle to get out on the ledge."

" I can't do it," Doyle said to Parr.

" Stay there an' burn then," Parr replied, moving away.

" Hold on," he pleaded. He clambered out, white and weak. " Oh, if I ever get out o' this," he said, " it's the last the fire department'll ever see of me."

Fortunately, he was on the end of the line, and Parr held him up. The men worked their way along with a painful cautiousness. " I feel like a blamed planked shad," Pim

THE SMOKE - EATERS

said. He was answered only by the hoarse breathing of Morphy.

Fuchs was already over the window-sill. Now Gallagher followed him. Morphy caught the sill and clung to it. "I can't," he panted. "I can't lift my leg. It's par-rar-alyzed."

Gallegher said, cheerily: "Come along, then, far enough — so's we can get Pim."

Morphy's teeth were chattering. Pim came grinning to the sash. They dragged the probationer into the window, and he collapsed on the floor. "I can't stand up," he confessed, shamefacedly. "I got wab-bles in the legs."

They lifted Doyle in, and stood in a ring around Morphy and him, drawing deep breaths. "How are you, Doyle?" Gallagher asked.

"Oh, I'm out o' this game," Doyle said. "There's easier ways of earnin' a livin' than this."

THE "RED-INK SQUAD"

They did not answer him. Pim and Parr put an arm each about Morphy, and raised him to his feet. "I s'pose we'll have to carry you down," Pim said. He added, at thought of his unprotected feet: "It'll just be my luck if this place's a tack factory."

Morphy staggered away from their support. "I'm all right," he said. "It was just in my legs — an' that scared me — I thought I'd bring you all down if I went. . . . Lord! How Jordan yelled."

They straggled along in silence to the stairs, and were met there by a squad of men who had been sent to the roof to lower ropes to them, and had looked down to see them, through the drift of the smoke, clinging miraculously to the flat wall at the sixth story. A triumphal procession escorted them to the street.

And that was the end of the Torrance fire, so far as the "red-ink squad" was concerned. Of the five probationers who had answered

THE SMOKE - EATERS

the alarm, only Fuchs and Morphy stood with Company No. 0 when the basement squad lined up with Gallegher's shoeless following at a neighboring bar to drink the health of the crew. "Spaghetti" was in the hospital. Doyle had taken himself off to his home without handing in any formal resignation. "Dan Jordan"—a ring of whispering men gathered around Lieutenant Gallegher, with their glasses in their hands, and heard of the end of him. The saloon-keeper came to listen to them across the bar. Gallegher saw him. "To the 'red-ink squad'!" he called.

They put their glasses to white teeth that flashed like negroes' in the blackness of their smoke-begrimed faces.

"And to the fire that made them black!" Pim added,—which, as the sequel showed, was at once a pun and a prophecy.

II

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

CAPTAIN MEAGHAN, running with a tossing lantern down the pier, at the head of his company, met Battalion Chief Tighe coming in the opposite direction. Tighe shouted: "Get off the after hatch! Powder an' oil aboard!" and passed like a flying shadow of himself through the mist into the darkness.

And that was all the information that Captain Meaghan got of the cargo that was smouldering in the *Phoebe*.

He leaped over the bulwarks of the deserted boat — a three-masted sailing vessel, bark-rigged — to find smoke curling up from the covering of the after hatchway. There

THE SMOKE - EATERS

was no other sign of fire to be seen. "Get her off, boys," he cried; and the men attacked the hatch with their hooks and axes. He looked about him for his lieutenant. "Gallegher!" he called. He got no reply. "Where's Gallegher?" he cried. And there was no answer.

Now Lieutenant Gallegher, at that moment, was coming at the double down the pier, having been delayed at the truck by the third officer of the *Phoebe*, who had been standing on the curbstone of the street, excitedly warning the firemen that there was powder aboard. He had fastened on Gallegher when he heard the lieutenant giving orders there. And Gallegher — having learned in unnecessary detail that the boat was loading with miscellaneous consignments of general merchandise, cartridges, and kerosene; that the explosives were in the upper hold aft, and the general merchandise below them; that the oil was being put

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

well forward, and was therefore not yet afire — had darted across the foggy street that was swarming now with police and firemen, and echoing with a hubbub of officers' voices, the whistles and bells of fire apparatus and the clatter of horses' hoofs. Just as he had reached the other side of the road, Battalion Chief Tighe had rushed out at him from the pier, had swerved to avoid him, tripped over the curb, and fallen heavily on the paving-stones. Gallegher had stopped and run back, to find another fireman raising the unconscious chief; and then, without waiting to aid, he had turned again and raced down the pier, eager to rejoin his company, so that Captain Meaghan might not have any smallest excuse for finding fault with him.

They had not been getting on smoothly together. Captain Meaghan was of the old school, gruff and unlettered. The lieutenant, though he was a black and burly man,

THE SMOKE - EATERS

was as neat as a barber in his person, and officially careful in his speech. He had stood high on his civil service examination for promotion to a lieutenancy; and he knew it was the captain's opinion that a civil service examination for a fireman was as absurd as a "preacher's license" for a harbor pilot.

He came breathless to the side of the *Phoebe*, while Captain Meaghan was still standing on the bulwarks above his men, giving them the light of his lantern on their work. The smoke was bursting through the broken hatch at every blow of the axes. "Get it off, boys! Get it off," Meaghan coached them.

He turned anxiously to look for the return of Tighe, since, in the absence of the battalion chief, he must rank in charge of a fire of which he knew nothing. And he saw his lieutenant.

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

“Tom,” he cried to “Long Tom” Donnelly, “go back an’ get a twelve-foot ladder. . . . Gallegher,” he greeted his assistant gruffly, “when the hatch’s off, get out that powder an’ throw it overboard.”

He had understood, from Tighe’s brief directions to him, that the oil was burning below the powder; and he knew that to flood the boat, in such conditions, would be to float the flame up to the explosives.

Gallegher put down his lantern, and went back to the bulwarks. He supposed that Captain Meaghan was afraid the engine company would be slow in coming up. He pointed to a squad of men dragging a line of hose through the misty circle of an electric light. “Here,” he said. “Here they are, now.”

Meaghan cried: “Eh? What? What’s that?”

“Here’s an engine company now,” Gallegher repeated.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“ Well? Supposin’ it is? ”

The lieutenant did not understand his tone. “ Can’t they flood it out quicker? ”

“ What’s that? ” Meaghan shouted.

Gallegher continued in his error. “ Can’t we flood it out? Do you need to risk the men? ”

Meaghan jumped down at him. “ By God! ” he said. “ Are yuh scared? ” and raised the lantern on him. He had been wondering why Gallegher had hung behind the men.

The hatch crashed and fell beneath the axes.

“ She’s loaded deep, ” Gallegher explained, confusedly, blinking at the light. “ We can sink her in no time — and the fire-boats’ll be here to help. What’s the use — ”

“ What’s the use? ” Meaghan stormed. “ Afraid of yer skin, are yuh? *You’re* a fireman, eh? ” He cursed in a fury of contempt. “ Boys, ” he cried to the men.

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

Gallegher put a hand on his arm. "Look here, sir," he said, thickly.

Meaghan shook him off. "Boys!" he shouted. "He's a-scared to lead yuh down that hatch."

He threw the light on Gallegher. The crew stared at him from the hatchway. The men of an engine company on the wharf shouldered to the bulwarks, asking "What's up? What's the matter?" "Long Tom" Donnelly pushed his way through them with the twelve-foot ladder.

"It's a lie," Gallegher broke out. "I say what's the use of riskin' your men when you can —"

Meaghan drowned his voice in the bellow of a maddened beast. "*You* take yer orders from *me!* D'yuh hear? Lead the men down that ladder, or I'll have yuh broke fer th' oily-headed, bandy-legged coward y' are!"

Gallegher threw out a passionate hand at him. "I'm just that much a coward,"

THE SMOKE - EATERS

he cried, "that you can't scare me with any threat of gettin' me broke. I'd be a damn sight worse coward if I'd be scared into leadin' men where they shouldn't ought to have to go!"

Meaghan turned to the men. "Y' hear that, Pim? Hear that, Donnelly? I want you fer witnesses. . . . Now," he said, fiercely, to Gallegher, "get to hell out of this."

Gallegher did not move. Meaghan swung his lantern to the engine company on the pier. "Volunteers!" he called. "I want eight men to bring up this powder."

There were twenty men shoving forward before the words were well out of his mouth; but his own crew were first. They lowered the ladder into the smoking hatch; and, in the crowding and confusion that followed, Gallegher slid down into the hold unobserved by the captain. Sergeant Pim, Parr, and "Long Tom" Donnelly went after

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

him. He began to pass the cases of cartridges to Parr at the foot of the ladder; from him they were handed to Pim and Donnelly on the rungs; and from Donnelly they reached the deck to go from man to man and overboard with a splash.

They worked with the quiet regularity of a trained bucket brigade. Gallegher stopped only once — to tie a handkerchief over his mouth. The other men had better air, the engine company aiding them with the shower of a spray nozzle, which fought back the smoke. Nevertheless, Parr had to be relieved, and three fresh men were sent down to fill the gap that was made in the chain as Gallegher moved farther and farther into the hold.

There were exactly two hundred and forty-six packages of explosives in the cargo; and Gallegher, while he toiled over them with bruised hands, half-stified and maddened by the heat, cursed the stupidity of

THE SMOKE - EATERS

the captain who had set him the task of taking them out. For himself, his world had come to an end. He had been held up to his crew as a coward, and he would be dismissed from the department for insubordination. That scene on the deck of the *Phoebe*—of him standing in the light of the captain's lantern, his men eying him from the shadow, and Meaghan crying out to them: "Boys, he's a-scared to lead yuh down that hatch"—possessed him in the darkness like a delirium. He went over his arguments as he worked; he protested against the injustice of the captain's charge; he fought against the folly of the captain's orders; but the shame of it all persisted, the light of the lantern was an eye of flaming contempt on him, and Meaghan's great voice rang out his infamy with a "Coward! Coward!" that was a bell booming in his ears. He struggled with the cases of cartridges, muttering to himself, sick and dizzy.

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

And every minute that he worked was a minute wasted. *That* was apparent now to Battalion Chief Tighe, who had come back to the boat, with his head bandaged, and who was storming about on the deck above, ordering squad after squad down the ladder to aid and relieve those below. It was impossible to turn a full stream into the burning vessel while the men were in the hold. It was equally impossible to recall them and attempt a redistribution for a new attack; for the fire had gained such headway that it could not be drowned out, now, before it would reach the explosives. It was plain, from the lightness of the smoke, that the merchandise was afire and not the oil; and Tighe, chafing at the situation, censured Meaghan for his misjudgment in a volley of oaths that drove the old captain, smarting and humiliated, into the file with his men, to work there like a private, passing cartridges across the deck.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

The crew of a hook-and-ladder truck were opening the forward hatch. A second crew had been ordered into the captain's saloon to open the hold from the stern. Line after line of hose had been laid along the pier. The *New Yorker* had come up whistling through the fog, and was fighting with a wrecking tug to get alongside the *Phoebe*. Everything was ready — everything seemed to pause and take breath — for the attack that should drown the fire in a deluge from a score of pipes.

And then, suddenly, from the bow of the boat, came a cry of alarm. A spurt of flame shot up a ruddy reflection on a burst of smoke. The thud of a small explosion shook the decks. There was a ringing shout of "Oil's afire! Oil's afire!" and a second can burst like a bomb. Tighe roared: "Get the men out! All ashore!" And the firemen who had swarmed like pirates from

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

peak to poop, went over the sides to the wharf as if from a sinking ship.

At the first word of danger, Captain Meaghan had dropped into the after hatch, and called to the men there to save themselves. Four dashed up the ladder from the smoke; but the smothered voice of Gallegher cried back to him: "There's only three cases;" and Meaghan groped his way forward to see Sergeant Pim and the lieutenant getting out the last packages by the light of a dim lantern.

The captain shouted, "Oil's loose!" Pim took a case of cartridges and ran to the ladder with it. Before he could get back, the flames burst in on Gallegher in a gush of burning kerosene that lit up the hold like a bonfire in a cave. Meaghan sprang to his lieutenant's aid. Gallegher passed him a box. He hurried back with it to Pim. The sergeant caught it from him, and started up the ladder. And Mea-

THE SMOKE - EATERS

ghan turned to see Gallegher staggering from the flames, with the last package of explosives in his hands, and the burning oil blazing around his feet.

A report behind the lieutenant filled the air with fire and threw him forward. Meaghan caught him as he fell, and dragged him to the ladder. There, having passed the case of cartridges to Pim, he raised the unconscious Gallegher to his shoulders, and climbed heavily to the deck.

But quick as they had been, the fire had been quicker. From the forward hatch the flames had leaped into the shrouds and the rigging, and from there had reached the ten-gallon tins of oil, lying, ready for loading, on the pier. The heat of midsummer had dried the planks of the wharf; and they flared up with the oil like a laid fire. On the other side of the pier, and nearer the street, a tramp freighter from the Southern coast had been discharging a cargo of cotton;

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

and when Meaghan reached the deck, a pile of these cotton bales was blazing, and the pier between him and the shore seemed to be flaming in a smother of smoke.

He could see the men running and shouting hither and thither in the road. The fire-boat had backed away from the *Phoebe* and had trained its big "monitor" on the bales and the oil-cans; and the powerful stream scattered and swept them across the pier in a torrent. It was impossible to run that gauntlet of smoke, fire, and water; and Meaghan knew it.

He laid Gallegher on the deck, stripped the smoking outer clothing off him, tore the handkerchief from his mouth, and began to fan air into his lungs with his helmet. It was air as hot as the stifle of an oven.

"We can't spend the night here, I guess," Pim said, as he tossed the last box of powder overboard.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“ Take him up on the poop-deck,” Meaghan replied.

A choking cloud blew over them from the glow in the after hatch. They carried Gallegher up the companion-ladder to stretch him out beside the skylight of the saloon; and they were met there by three firemen who had been cut off at their work in the stern, and who came groping up the stairs from the saloon to the poop-deck, to ask, “ What’s up? Eh? What’s up? ”

“ All hell’s up,” Pim said. “ We’ll have to swim out, I guess.”

Meaghan looked around him. “ Where’s that wrecking tug? ”

They were shut off from the sight of shore, now, by the thick oil-smoke that rolled up like the belch of a liner’s stack, shot with flames at its base,— a burning curtain of smoke from which a furnace heat was blown in scorching puffs into their faces. They could hear only that pulse of indis-

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

tinguishable noises — the roar and crackle of fire, the hiss of water, and the throbbing of steam pumps — which shakes the air in a dull tremble that deafens the ear as a too great glare of light blinds the eye. Behind them a glowing haze of smoke and fog hung down to the water.

“The *N' Yorker* ought to be over there,” one of the firemen said.

They planned to swim to her.

Meaghan said, “Get me some water, Pim,” and began to work over the limp body of his lieutenant.

The glass in the saloon skylight cracked and fell tinkling. Smoke began to curl up through the vents.

“Gettin' too hot fer *me*,” a fireman said, kicking off his rubber boots.

“Me, too,” another agreed, following his example.

The third stripped to his underclothing and walked aft.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

And then Pim, at the rail, yelled hoarsely: "Oil's afloat! We're cut off from the fire-boat!" And the three men — knowing that if they delayed until the burning oil surrounded them, they would be beyond hope — ran to the stern and dived overboard.

Pim threw off his coat. He and Captain Meaghan dragged Gallegher to the taffrail. They tore loose a life-buoy that hung there. They leaped with the unconscious man into the water.

The shock and coolness brought the lieutenant to his senses. He came up, choking and spitting, with Meaghan's fingers twisted in his collar; and he splashed and beat the water wildly with his hands. Pim thrust the buoy at him.

"Get a hold of that," he shouted, and Gallegher clung to it.

The captain had been compelled to jump overboard with his boots on; and for a

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

time he was busy trying to get free of them, while Pim kept him afloat.

“ Where am I? ” Gallegher gasped.

“ Yuh’re in the bay, ” Pim answered.

“ Can yuh swim? ”

“ Yes, ” Gallegher said.

“ Well, kick out, then, ” Pim advised him. “ There’s considerable warm oil comin’ this way. ” He added: “ We’d better get out’s far as we can ’cross the current. Oil’ll be loose in the other slip, there. ”

Meaghan, having rid himself of his boots, breasted a small wave with a strong stroke; and Pim and Gallegher struck out beside him, the lieutenant pushing the life-buoy ahead of him as he swam. He was trying to recollect what had happened to him, but he did not waste his breath in asking questions. He was weak, and the water splashed up irritatingly in his face. They swam in silence.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“ There ought to be some — some tugs aroun’ here,” Meaghan said at last.

Pim raised his shoulders, treading water, and stretched his neck. “ Ship ahoy!” he shouted. Voices answered out of the mist to their right. “ That’s them three swimmin’ down the piers,” he said.

Meaghan turned on his side, and swam in that direction; and the others followed him, borne along on the tide.

Gallegher had come upon a confused recollection of his quarrel with his captain, and he paused to frown at the glare of the fire behind him. When he looked around again, a little wave struck him smartly in the face, to remind him of present things; and he coughed the salt water from a throat and nostrils that were already sensitive with heat and smoke.

Pim growled, sympathetically: “ We’ve been smoked. We’ll be pickled now.”

Gallegher did not reply. He speculated

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

on the back of Meaghan's head, bobbing before him in the water, and he wondered what the thought was under that matted gray hair. For himself, he felt as if he had been wakened from a bad dream by the cold water — had been wakened to a world of new efforts and new opportunities, of which a man might take advantage, regardless of the past. Gallegher was an optimist; he shook the memory of that charge of cowardice from his thought with a toss of his head, and breasted forward.

They had been swimming for what seemed to him an eternity of fog and splashing water — with the boats of the East River, blinded and peevish in the thickness of the July night, lowing and complaining to one another forlornly in the faint distance — when he heard the throb of marine engines somewhere to their left.

Almost at the same instant Meaghan raised himself and roared, "Halloo! Halloo!

THE SMOKE - EATERS

there!" in a voice like the blast of a fog-horn.

Gallegher caught the low pin-hole gleam of a red port light. "It's a tug," he said.

"All abo-o-ord!" Pim shouted.

They wheeled into line toward the boat, which began to show at the foot of the haze.

"Ship ahoy! Man overboard!" Pim cried.

"All right," Meaghan said. "They're comin'."

The green light showed beside the red as the tug bore down on them. They could see a man in the bows, and they yelled a warning to him not to run them down. The hemp-fendered nose of the boat was not three yards from them when it stopped.

A moment later, Gallegher had caught the rope-end, and, with the assistance of Pim and Meaghan, had climbed up the low side

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

to the deck, to find himself weak in the knees and top-heavy. He leaned over the side to give a hand to his captain, and Meaghan made a sound in his throat that might have been intended for a gruff and unmollified "Thanks." Pim came up the rope hand over hand. And Gallegher turned away to dance the water out of his ears and to frown to himself at Meaghan's manner; for it was a manner that brought all his troubles back on him, the heavier for the unreasoning interval of relief.

The captain of the tug — McVickar was his name — took a clay pipe from his hairy lips to ask them impolitely where they had come from. Gallegher looked up, but did not answer. Meaghan took no heed whatever. Pim nodded his head in the direction of the fire, and continued to wring water from the legs of his trousers. "Blamed pants 's done fer," he complained, with the resentment of a man who has to buy his own uniform.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“ What’s afire? ” McVickar asked, impatiently.

“ Everything in sight,” Pim said.

“ Any boats? ”

“ Ought to be. Oil’s afloat.”

McVickar saw a prospect of salvage money. “ Full ahead,” he shouted to the engineer, who was leaning from the window of the engine-room. The tug shot forward on the kick of the screw.

It had not gone ten yards before there was a far call from the water, and Meaghan turned to see the three remaining firemen swimming toward them.

“ Hol’ on! Hol’ on! Pick up those men! ” he cried.

The tug captain looked around to ask: “ Who’s runnin’ this boat? ”

Now if either Gallegher or Meaghan had been asked that question in the tone of mere inquiry, it would have taken them an appreciable time to make an answer to it; for

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

they were as slow of mind and as slow of speech as all men whose lives are spent in action, not in thought. But what Gallagher heard was not the words, but the tone of insolent defiance in which they were spoken; and before a man of thought, unaccustomed to action, could have made up his mind that McVickar intended to abandon the three firemen struggling in the water — or, at best, before such a man could have begun to decide what to do to make the captain and the tug wait to rescue the swimmers — Gallagher had flung himself on McVickar, and gripped him by the throat.

He knew that McVickar had a tugboat crew of at least five, but he was full of a dumb resentment against Meaghan, and he was hungering for a fight. He throttled McVickar, backed him to the bulwarks, tripped him as he staggered, and dealt him a blow that broke his clay pipe in his teeth, and toppled him overboard as he fell.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

He struck the water with a wild yell, and went under.

“Look out fer the mate,” Meaghan shouted, and closed with a burly deck-hand.

Pim and Gallegher grappled with the mate, and wrested a revolver from him. “Over he goes,” Pim grunted, putting in a body blow that doubled the man up. They threw him, writhing, across the bulwarks, and heaved him over, head first. Before his shrill cries had time to grow faint in the wake of the tug, Meaghan — leaving the deck-hand lying unconscious, with his head against the house-work — ran forward to the wheel-house. “The engineer!” he cried, as he went by. Pim and the lieutenant charged down on the engine-room. The boat made a wide circuit in the water, running like a chicken without its head. Then it shivered and stopped short.

Meaghan came out of the wheel-house

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

wiping his mouth with the back of a bleeding hand. He nodded to Gallagher, who joined him from the engine-room. "All right," he said. "I guess she'll wait to pick them up, now."

She waited, rocking quietly in the fog, with the three firemen standing in a little circle, back to back, amidships. Gallagher was facing the engine-room with the mate's revolver in his hand. Captain Meaghan was watching the wheelsman in the bows. Pim was standing with a coil of rope, ready for Captain McVickar and his mate, who were swimming up together.

"Hol' on to that," he said, tossing the rope-end out to them. "An' don't try to come aboard till I say the word, er I'll step on yer face."

"You'll get thirty days for this," McVickar screamed. "You dirty river pirates!"

Pim laughed. "Whoop her up!" he

THE SMOKE - EATERS

called to the three firemen who were swimming feebly toward them. "We can't keep this ocean liner waitin' all night fer *you*."

When they had the three firemen aboard, they left the engineer and the wheelsman to assist the captain and the mate over the side, and went forward to the bows, regardless of the curses of McVickar and the abuse of the mate. "Better take this, sir," Gallegher said, apologetically, to Meaghan, handing him the revolver.

"No. I don't want it. I don't want it," Meaghan said, and turned away from him to watch the fire grow and brighten as the tug swung around again and cut through the water toward it.

McVickar shouted, from a safe distance: "I'll fix you!"

They did not reply. The men, feeling the constraint of Meaghan's ill temper, drew away from the two officers and sat down on

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

the sides of the boat. Gallegher waited for his foreman to speak. There had always been an unfortunate silence between them; and now,—to the lieutenant's misunderstanding of his captain,—it was the silence of the most implacable anger of an unreasonable old man.

“Oil hasn't spread,” Meaghan growled at last.

“Fire-boats keepin' it back, I guess,” Gallegher replied, curtly, from his experience—knowing how those vessels would sweep the water with their streams, and brush back and round up the burning oil until it burned itself out.

“I guess,” Meaghan agreed, and returned to his moody silence.

They could see — across the flame-lit water — a fleet of tugs crowding on the starboard quarter of the Southern freighter that had been lying on the other side of the *Phoebe's* pier. She was burning in her upper works.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

The tugs had lines aboard her, and were dragging her out, stern first, into mid-stream.

Meaghan turned. "Did *you* know where the oil was?"

Gallegher frowned. "Of course," he said, in a puzzled tone. "One of the mates told me."

Meaghan muttered a disgusted curse on his own stupidity, and looked away.

Gallegher stared at him. "Why!" he said. "I thought—I thought you knew."

The captain shook his head. He replied in a moment: "Tighe didn't tell me."

There followed a laboriously thoughtful silence for Gallegher. He said, at last, fervently: "Hell!"

It was his apology; and the captain accepted it without a word, dumb and dispirited, and gazing blankly at the swarm of tugs fighting around the freighter.

But when Pim called out, "There's the

A CHARGE OF COWARDICE

New Yorker. We could get aboard her," Meaghan spun around and shouted, savagely: "Tell 'em to shove the tug in alongside her, er by — we'll tip the whole — crew of 'em into the drink again."

They found it easy to get transferred to the fire-boat, but impossible to get ashore from her until the fire had been put out; and when they finally reported to Battalion Chief Tighe for duty, there was nothing for them to do. He looked them over with a mildly threatening eye. "Get back to your house an' get dried," he said. "Take my rig. I'll come up on the truck." He added, to Gallegher and the captain, "I want to see you two."

And he saw them — and he heard them — through an hour-long conference that kept the crew hushed in awful expectation in their bunkroom on the other side of Meaghan's office door. Pim refused to

THE SMOKE - EATERS

answer any questions for the men, and went off to sleep; but " Long Tom " Donnelly, with one eye open for promotion, lay waiting to be summoned as a witness of the lieutenant's insubordination, and listened to the growl of voices in the office, wakefully. When Tighe came out, at last, he was smoking one of Meaghan's cigars; and Donnelly, from his cot, got a glimpse of Gallegher, as the door opened, sitting at his ease beside the captain's desk, breathing the fragrant blue, and puffing at another of " th' ol' man's " cheroots.

And Donnelly was the only one dissatisfied with that ending of the affair.

III

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

IT was a wet October night, and "Sergeant" Pim was doing his turn of duty as "house watchman" at the desk, with the blurred light of a street lamp staring blearily at him through the open door, and the truck-house clock ticking off his "stretch" comfortably above him. A man drifted in from the fog to catch on the chain that sagged across the doorway, and asked the time in a broken English and a tone insidiously meek.

Pim focused an absent eye on him without answering, for the hour was plain on the clock there, and the man was a tenement-

THE SMOKE - EATERS

quarter foreigner, in a misfit of cast-off clothes.

Silence did not discourage him. He looked up at the timepiece. "Nine?" he said. "Iss it — sure?"

Pim chose to receive that question of the accuracy of the clock as an insult to the house, and to accept, as an added insolence, the manner in which it was asked — with a yellow-toothed leer at once wheedling and sly. He raised his eyebrows to an impossible height on his forehead — in a monkey-trick he had, as the "clown" of the company — and then drew them down in a portentous scowl of eye-blazing rage, puffed cheeks, and bristling mustache. And the man at the door, hiding his grin, at once, in a hairy growth — as coarse as the beard of a cocoanut — which covered his face from his eyes to his throat, began to jabber a frightened explanation of how he had to meet a friend in Park Row at nine o'clock.

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

“ Long Tom ” Donnelly, who was pitchforking the bedding for one of the horses, called out to him in the tone of a threat:

“ Vat’s dot, eh? ”

The man turned his head to flash a side-glance at the stall with an evil glisten of the whites of his eyes; and, at sight of Donnelly’s sallow face, he sidled away from the door, and disappeared in the fog again.

The wrinkles of Pim’s good-natured smile subsided slowly into a blank placidity of face. He fondled his mustache on a pouted lip for a vacant-minded minute or more. Then he clasped his hands over his waist and twirled his thumbs for another bored interval. Finally he threw back his head in a sleepy yawn at the clock.

The hands of it marked fifteen minutes after nine.

His eyes opened as his mouth suddenly shut. He twisted his neck, and stared.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“ *Nine* iss it? ” he muttered. “ An’ that ain’t more’n five minutes ago.”

He got up and walked uneasily to the door, to peer down the street — choked with yellow mist — in the direction which the man had taken. And it struck him, then, that this was *not* the direction in which Park Row lay.

He came back to Donnelly. “ Ever seen that mug afore? ” he asked.

“ Sure,” Donnelly drawled. “ Lives on a top floor down street.”

Pim studied the clock.

“ He got a friend o’ mine run out o’ there once,” Donnelly went on. “ Said he was stealin’, when he was up-stairs peddlin’ ‘Cleansine’.” He added, drily: “ I reported him for not havin’ enough fire-escapes.”

Pim fingered his chin. “ Yuh’d know the place if yuh saw it? ”

“ I guess yes,” Donnelly answered, with grim conviction.

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

Pim turned on his heel. "All right," he said, "take this desk a jiffy;" and he started up the stairway three steps at a bound.

Donnelly had a habitual pose of critical imperturbability, and he leaned on his pitchfork to watch Pim's ascension, now, in a cool contempt for his waste of energy. He heard him rap on a door above stairs. He heard the captain's deep voice answer. He heard the door closed with a careful click of the lock.

When he put up his pitchfork and went to the desk, he sat down with an expression of bored superiority and resignation. Pim and he were the oldest members of the company; but while *he* carried himself always with a dignity and reserve befitting his wisdom and experience, Pim played the fool for the sake of being popular with the men, and scoffed at Donnelly's pretensions with a freedom that left no friendliness

THE SMOKE - EATERS

between them. Their intercourse was an affair of mutual antipathy, occasionally relieved by outbursts of mutual contempt.

Donnelly, therefore, did not worry his calm with any speculation as to the cause of Pim's excitement. He did not move even when he heard the door up-stairs opened again, and heard the captain call: "Take Donnelly. I'll put another man on the desk."

Pim dropped down the sliding-pole beside the truck. "Come along with me, Tom," he said, fumbling among the forcible-entrance tools. "We're goin' to make a call."

Donnelly licked his lips. "What's doin'?"

"That's what *I* want to know," Pim said. "Does yer friend live top floor front?"

"No; back."

Pim came around the truck, buttoning the company's long "jimmy" under his coat. "Fire escape, eh?"

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

Donnelly nodded. "Up the back. What's doin'?"

Pim laughed, irritatingly. "Nuthin'," he said, "er a su'prise party fer yer friend. Get a move on."

He ducked under the door-chain, and "Long Tom" followed as gracefully as a camel. They turned down toward the waterfront, Pim setting a pace that did not suit Donnelly's dignity, and maintaining a silence that was annoying to his pride.

"Did y' ever prove an alibi?" the sergeant asked, at last.

Donnelly growled: "Kind o' gay, ain't yuh?"

"Oh, I don't know," Pim retorted. "Not's gay's *you'll* be if 'his whiskers' ain't expectin' to collect insurance on his beddin'." And Donnelly closed his thin lips on a sudden understanding of the situation.

Pim spat in a manner of importance.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“ When one of those gentry gets int’rested in drawin’ attention to the time,” he said, in a tone of superior knowledge, “ it’s like’s not he wants witnesses that he weren’t at home about then. See? . . . Get a gait on.”

Donnelly reluctantly swung a quicker stride.

“ There’s more things to be learned on th’ East Side,” Pim added, “ than comes out’n a civil service exam.” And that was a thrust at Donnelly’s ambition to qualify for a lieutenancy.

They hurried down the greasy flagstones, in a fog so thick that they could not more than see the disembodied phantoms of the street-lamps, hung weirdly in their halos across the road.

“ He’s watchin’ aroun’ here somewheres, I’ll bet,” Pim said. “ Keep in the dark best yuh can.”

Donnelly stopped short before an open

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

door that gave on a hallway as dark as a sewer.

“ This his hole? ” Pim said.

Donnelly grunted.

They groped their way through the narrow passage into a small court, dimly lit from the windows of a “ rear tenement ” that fronted on it. “ He’s up on top,” Donnelly explained, sulkily. “ They’re Dago trimmin’ fact’ries underneath.”

“ Good enough,” Pim said. “ There’s no lights, is there? ”

They could see none. Pim found a peddler’s push-cart in an angle of the wall, and they wheeled it over noiselessly to up-end it against the bricks beneath the first balcony of the fire-escape. Donnelly gave Pim a lift from it, and the old sergeant swung himself up to the ladder with the ease of long training in life-saving drill.

He was a small man, and he went up the iron rungs as nimbly as a boy. He saw no

THE SMOKE - EATERS

lights in any of the windows until he came to the top floor; and there, though a blanket had been tacked up inside the glasses, a glimmer of light showed through a large rent in the improvised blind.

He put his eye to that peep-hole. He saw a table in the middle of the room with a large glass oil-lamp set in the center of it, on a torn and discolored lace curtain, that had been spread for a table-cloth. He saw above the lamp a string of herrings, hung there ostensibly to dry. And, knowing the methods of East Side arson, he did not need to be told that there was somewhere in the room a hungry cat, whose part it was to draw down the table-cloth and upset the lamp in attempting to climb on the table to get at the fish.

He took his jimmy from under his coat, and forced the window stealthily. Then he raised the sash, propped it with the tool, and lifted a corner of the blanket.

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

A cat was crouching in a corner of the room, where it had been eating the tail of a herring.

He put aside the blanket, and clambered in, smiling sarcastically. "Ol' devil fer-got to hang 'em all fer yuh, eh, puss?" he said. The animal answered with a frightened mew. "All right," he laughed, "just as *you* say. But it's lucky *I* found you at this, instead of 'his whiskers'."

He pushed back his cap from his forehead, and pursed his lips coaxingly. "Poor puss, poor puss," he said. "Gimme a grip on the back o' yer neck. That's the way. Come along, now. Never mind yer grub. I'll fix that fer yuh. Come along."

He carried it to an open door that showed the long tables of a "sweat-shop" sewing-room; and he shut it in there. "Now," he said, scratching his ear, "the nex' thing — the nex' thing — *is* — to get a hold like that on Tommy's friend."

THE SMOKE - EATERS

He looked thoughtfully around the squalid room that was at once kitchen, bedroom, dining-room, and parlor. A double bed had been drawn up near the table, and the soiled coverings had been thrown over the side of it to make a trail for the flames. He nodded. "Th' ol' man an' th' ol' woman," he said. A mattress lay in the opposite corner under a spread of old clothes. "An' the kids," he added.

He took his chin in his hand. "Now, if he's sent the family off for the night, I can do it. If he ain't—"

He went out the window again, and slid down the ladders to Donnelly. "Tell the cap'n," he said, "it's th' ol' game—the cat an' th' oil-lamp. Tell 'm I'm goin' to wait here, to lay fer the man. An' look, now: when yuh've reported, come back to the corner of the street, see? an' get in the shade by the alarm box. An' when I yell 'Fire!' send her in."

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

Donnelly grumbled: "What t'ell? What're yuh doin'?"

Pim said, curtly: "I'm goin' to help yer friend collect his insurance."

"He's no friend o' mine," Donnelly complained. "I want to get to bed."

"Yuh'll get to bed 'fore *he* will," Pim said. "Yuh can bet on that. Make yer sneak, now. I'm in charge here."

Donnelly turned unwillingly into the hallway, and the sergeant ran back up the ladders.

He cut down a clothes-line that was stretched from the fire-escape, stripped off his uniform coat and left it with his cap on the balcony, jumped into the room, dropping the blanket behind him to conceal the open window, and began rapidly to tear up the bed-spread into narrow strips, which he rolled and knotted into a small hard ball. Then he cut up the clothes-line, and began to plait the pieces together into various lengths

THE SMOKE - EATERS

of twisted rope, working busily in the lamp-light, without raising his eyes, and every now and then laughing a lean, dry chuckle over his thoughts.

When he heard a footstep on the stairs, he sprang back into a corner where the leaf of the opened door would cover him. A hand fumbled at the knob; he closed his fist on the rag ball which he had made, and tossed the cords over his shoulder. A key grated in the lock with a sound that set his nostrils twitching over the tickle of a bristling mustache. The door was opened cautiously, and hung so for a dozen stealthy breaths. Then the man stepped in, and shut it; and Pim, with one swift stride forward, struck up at the base of the man's skull between the rim of his broken derby and the greasy collar of his coat.

His hat leaped in the air; his head snapped forward; he threw out his hands with a

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

sickening grunt; his knees broke, and he came thudding down in a heap on himself like a buckled wall at a fire. Pim pounced on him, and tied his hands together behind his back; then he rolled him over to thrust the rag ball into his mouth, and bound a twisted strip of blanket around his jaw, to hold the gag; finally he leaped back to lock the door, and said, grimly, "Got you!"

Lifting the unconscious man into a chair, he tied him, hands and feet, to the back and legs of it. And when he had tried all the knots for the second time, he got a jug of water from a basin on a box in the corner, emptied it over the bowed head, and sat down on the edge of the table to wait.

There was a long, shuddering sigh of returning consciousness. The dripping head began to lift slowly. The body stiffened against the cords with a start as the man looked up. And Pim smiled and smiled into a pair of wide and blinking eyes until

THE SMOKE - EATERS

they narrowed in a pucker of keen wrinkles under the lowered brows.

The sergeant nodded. "Jus' got here in time," he said, genially. "I was afeard yer friend in Park Row might keep yuh late. And that little illum'nation of yours 's been delayed too long as it is. Yer people'll be comin' in on it."

The man made a stifled noise in his throat, looking down at the rope around his waist and the knots at his ankles.

"Don't worry about *them*," Pim said. "I'll look after *them*. . . . Yer cat —"

The gleaming eyes shifted in a quick search of the corners of the room.

Pim smiled. "Yer cat don't know its business. What yuh want is to train that cat. Yuh can't expec' it to pull off a job like this without practice. See?"

The man's eyes set in a glazed stare of stupidity, which Pim had seen before in the faces of men no less cunning. He smiled

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

again, with a more contemptuous curl of the lip. "What I move we ought to do," he said, pleasantly, "is jus' edacate him. We ought to give him a fair chanst. An' if he don't do the stunt the firs' time, we ought to let him try again. What d' *you* say? I've a lot o' faith in that cat. I believe he can pull off the game all right. He's got a look like you about his whiskers; that's why."

He got down off the table, and crossed the room, to open the door of the sweat-shop. He called the cat, and it came to him, tail erect, trustingly. He took it up, purring, in his arms.

The chair creaked with the stealthy strain of muscles against the cords as he came back. "If yuh're not comfortable in that seat," he said, sarcastically, "take another."

He sat down on the bed, and stroked the cat. "Yuh see," he went on, smoothly, "the thing's like this: A man's got a

THE SMOKE - EATERS

right to hang up a herring er two to dry, over a table with a lamp on it. Sure, he has. An' supposin' there's a cat in the room—a cat that's got a nose fer fish—an' supposin' he knocks over the lamp an' starts a fire—an' burns a house er so, an' a half-dozen women an' kids—an' blisters up a crew o' firemen—er maybe kills some. Well, ain't the house insured, an' don't the firemen get paid good wages? Sure, they do. There's no kick comin' on that. Eh, puss? The kick comes about the cat. The cat loses his life, an' don't get nuthin'—not even a chaw o' fish. Eh, puss? An' that's what I say, too. A man that's got his beddin' insured ought to stay an' look after his cat."

He leaned over to glare at his trussed victim. "Now," he said, in another tone, "no jury on th' island 'd find you guilty of attemptin' arson on a game like this. Neither'd I. What proof've I got that the

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

cat'd upset th' lamp? Mebbe he wouldn't upset it at all. Yuh get the benefit of the doubt, sure. An' I'm goin' to give it to yuh."

He got up and raised the cat to give it a sniff of the fish. "I don't feel eq'al to decidin' this case," he said. "I'm goin' to leave it to the cat."

He put it down on the floor, and it mewed hungrily up at him.

"I'm goin' to leave you an' th' cat in here together. An' if the cat don't go after the fish, yuh're acquitted on circumstantial evidence. An' if the cat *do* go after the fish — well, this house's insured an' the firemen 're paid good wages. An' *you — you,*" he broke out, suddenly, "yuh sneakin' firebug, yuh'll fry in yer own pan here — yuh'll bake in yer own fire here — yuh'll cook with yer rank fish here till there ain't the small end of a cinder of yuh left. An' if I know the jury that'll sit on yer thief's soul, then,

THE SMOKE - EATERS

s'welp me, yuh'll sizzle — sizzle — sizzle till th' everlastin' end of everything after that."

The man had listened, staring blankly, with no signs of understanding; but now, when Pim put aside the blanket that covered the open window, and reached his cap and coat, the sight of that uniform startled him into a futile struggle of drawn neck and tugging shoulders. His breath fluttered in a quivering nostril. His eyes, bared of the lids, swam big with fear.

"Know what's comin', now, eh?" Pim sneered. "I thought yuh'd wake up."

He put on his coat and his cap with the air of a workman who has finished his day's "job." He locked the door of the sweat-shop coolly. He stepped back to the window. "I'd like to stay an' hear yer verdict, puss," he said, straddling the sill, "but there's likely to be an alarm of fire rung into the truck-house pretty soon. I got to get back."

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

He dropped the blanket, climbed out on the fire-escape, and closed the window with a slam. Then he began to raise it again, inch by inch, with the care and noiselessness of a burglar; and when he had propped it up with his "jimmy," he put his eye to the peep-hole, and grinned in the dark.

The man had sunk back weakly in the chair, breathless with a struggle to free himself, his nostrils working like the gills of a caught fish, his eyes drawn aside, in a fearful fascination, to the cat. It had gone across the room to the corner in which Pim had first seen it eating the herring, and it was smelling and licking the floor where the fish had been. When it had cleaned up every last scent there, it looked up hungrily at the string above the table, polishing its chops with a wistful tongue.

The man made a gurgling noise, to attract its attention, and it trotted over to him to rub against his tied leg. He tried to smile

THE SMOKE - EATERS

invitingly down on it with a muffled grin, at the same time that he worked treacherously at the cords that held his hands. It jumped on his knee and mewed at the fish. He jerked vainly at his bonds. The muscles in his temples swelled in an impotent effort to chew through the twist of blanket that held him gagged. It was useless.

He was glaring desperately at the friendly animal, when it made as if to jump from his leg to the table, and he threw it to the floor with a quick fling of the knee.

Pim put his hand to his mouth, his shoulders shaking.

The man was almost weeping in the helplessness of rage and fear. The cat had seated itself at his feet, looking up at the fish, with its back to him, and whisking its tail across the toe of his shoe. And then the bound foot, held at the ankle, wriggled to raise its heel, and, when the tail came back, snapped down on it like a rat-trap.

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

The cat jumped with a scream of agony, and, finding itself held, writhed around to bury its claws in its master's leg, biting and scratching like a wild thing, so that the man stiffened in his pain with a start that released it, and it bounded off to a far corner, where it sat down to lick its bruised tail.

Pim stifled a chuckle.

The man opened his eyes and blinked away the smarting tears, his face white with passion. The cat dressed its wounds, and watched him furtively. He bent forward in his chair, and stretched his neck as if he were about to spring. The cat crouched. The chair creaked. The cat backed against the wall, mewling plaintively. He shook his head at it with a choked growl, and it began to crawl away toward the other end of the room. He followed it with a glitteringly vindictive eye. It darted across behind the table, and skulked out of his sight.

Evidently he had intended to keep it in

THE SMOKE - EATERS

such terror of him that it would forget its hunger, but here, now, it was safe from him and nearer the fish than before. And if he sat quiet it would be on the table as soon as it found its scent. He blinked and studied.

Then suddenly he sat up to brace himself in the chair, and kicked out at his fetters, in a passionate convulsion, with both feet — with the unforeseen result that he threw himself off his balance, toppled over squirming, and fell heavily on his back; and the cat, frightened by the noise, leaped for shelter under the table, caught in the meshes of the lace curtain that had been spread for a cloth, clawed and rolled around in a fighting frenzy, and brought down the lamp.

It broke in a flaming explosion on the floor.

“ Now,” Pim gloated, “ we’ll see how he likes a little scorchin’ himself.”

The fall had broken the back off his chair, and when he rolled over on his face, he found himself to this extent free that he could

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

straighten himself out. His legs were still tied to the rungs; his hands, pinioned behind him, were fastened to the spindles of the back; but by resting his forehead on the floor, he could draw his knees up under him. The bed was already afire with the splatter of blazing oil, and the room was filled with a smoke which Pim could smell through the blanket. The cat had fought itself free of the burning curtain after rolling into the mattress with it. And when the man got to his knees he turned to see the whole room behind him apparently in a blaze. He made a frantic effort to jump to his feet; the chair tripped him, and he came crashing down at full length on his face. He did not move again.

“Serve yuh right if I left yuh there,” Pim said, stripping off his coat.

He took a knife from his pocket and opened it. He tore down the blanket from the window, and wound it about his arm. Then he

THE SMOKE - EATERS

jumped into the room with his elbow shielding his face, and dashed through the smoke to his victim. He released him with a few deft slashes, opened the hall door, and threw him out on the landing after the cat. Having carefully shut the door again, he muffled his hands in the blanket, ran to the mattress and rolled it up over the burning clothes to stifle the flames. He overturned the table on the bed and stamped out the fire in the bedding that lay on the floor. And finally, having smothered the burning oil with his blanket, he slipped through the window, closed it after him, and raced down the ladders with his jimmy and his coat under his arm. He dropped at the feet of "Long Tom" Donnelly. "All right," he said; "it's all over."

"What'd yuh do?" Donnelly asked.

"Well," Pim said, "if yuh'll go up there an' get the waddin' out of yer friend's jaw, p'raps he'll tell yuh. M'own opinion is, if

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

yuh want to know the facts, yuh'll have to ask the cat. . . . Here, take this jimmy a minute."

He began to put on his coat; and he stopped, with his arms half-way in the sleeves, to cry: "What're *you* doin' here? I thought I tol' you to stand by the alarm-box at the corner."

Donnelly cleared his throat. "I lef' a cop there," he explained. "I thought yuh'd want me here to help yuh — p'raps."

Pim thrust his head forward to stare at him in the dim light. "A cop!" he said, with a hoarse oath. "A cop!"

"Sure," Donnelly replied, in too innocent a tone. "What's the matter with that?"

Pim clenched his teeth and cursed him. "Oh, yuh long scut," he said. "Yuh vinegary face. That's what yuh done, is it?" He jerked his coat on with a twist of his shoulders. "That's yer game, is it?"

Donnelly took a step back, and changed the

THE SMOKE - EATERS

jimmy from his left hand to his right. Pim looked at him a long time, and then laughed — a laugh as mirthful as the leer of a skull.

“ An’ that’s Donnelly,” he said. “ That’s Long Tom Donnelly, eh? There’s a head fer yuh, now, ain’t it? There’s a sharp brain, eh? Gad! ” He threw back his head and cackled. “ The cap’n’ll laugh to hear this. Turn aroun’ till I pat y’ on the back, Tom — with the toe o’ my boot. Turn aroun’. No? ”

“ What’s wrong with yuh? ” Donnelly complained. “ I ain’t done nothin’ to yuh. I didn’t know what yuh were up to — up there. I thought any one’d do at the box as well as me.”

“ Of course yuh did, Tom,” Pim soothed him. “ Sure yuh did, Tom. An’ maybe better, eh? ’Specially a cop — in a game like this, eh? ”

“ Well,” Donnelly defended himself, “ why

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

didn't yuh tell me what yuh were at? How was *I* to know?"

"Sure," Pim sneered. "How was *you* to know? . . . What'd yuh tell him?"

"I tol' him yuh were layin' fer a man that was tryin' to set his flat afire."

Pim cursed with plaintive volubility. "An' suppose this mug goes an' makes a kick now, where'll *I* be?"

"That's *your* lookout," Donnelly answered, boldly. "If yuh've been gettin' too gay, it ain't my fun'ral."

Pim drew a long, sharp breath. "No," he said. "It's mine. Who's th' undertaker? What's the cop's name?"

"Slogan," Donnelly answered, with a barely distinguishable note of satisfaction.

Pim buttoned up his coat. "Ah-hah?" he said. "Slogan, eh? The new man, eh? Ah-hah!"

He began to laugh suddenly. "An' that's Donnelly! That's long, thin, suetty-jawed,

THE SMOKE - EATERS

Tom Donnelly. Go home, Thomas, my boy, an' go to bed. Yer head'll be tired. Yuh must've overworked it gettin' up a game like that. Get asleep quick, er yuh'll have brain fever."

Donnelly licked his lips in a way he had when he was puzzled.

Pim turned into the hallway. "I'll remember yuh, Tom," he called back over his shoulder, and went laughing down the passage.

He had known the Slogans, father and son, since the days before Cherry Hill was an Irish quarter.

A half-hour later he came back to the truck-house with policeman Slogan, and they went up-stairs together to make a report in embellished detail to Captain Meaghan, who smiled through it all like the big child he was. "Yuh want to look out, Pim," he said, at last. "He may raise a squeal."

ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

“ Not while he has that plug in his jaw, cap’n,” Pim said.

“ Plug!” Meaghan cried. “ Did yuh leave the gag in him? ”

“ Sure,” Pim said. “ I couldn’t get his teeth open.”

“ An’ what’s more,” the policeman said, with a grin, “ when it comes to talkin’ about this business, he allus will have it in. I saw him. He’s scared dumb. Mark my words, cap’n, he’ll never raise no squeal.”

And, so far as the authorities know, he never did. As for Donnelly — as Pim says, “ They say St. Patrick drove all the snakes out of Ireland, but there’s a good few of th’ Irish breed in the fire department, an’ when I step near the tail of one, I get off an’ away without any debatin’. There’ll be another of his kind happen along some day, an’ put a sting in him. Don’t doubt it.”

IV

PRIVATE MORPHY'S ROMANCE

THE hook-and-ladder truck of Company No. 0, with plunging horses and a furious bell, came struggling through the frozen slush of the dark side street, shot out into the cleaner avenue, and slewed and slid wildly on the icy asphalt as it turned the circle of the corner light. "Skatin's good," Sergeant Pim observed.

Young Morphy — once of the "Red-Ink" squad — was beside him, holding out from the step at arm's length, and craning his long neck. Pim gripped and held him as the man on the "tiller," bringing round the tail of the truck in the swing of a game of "crack

PRIVATE MORPHY'S ROMANCE

the whip," skidded the rear wheels into the car tracks with a lurch that would have thrown Morphy into the street. "Want to break yer crockery on the stones?" Pim grumbled. "What's wrong with yuh?"

From little Fuchs behind them, there sounded a sarcastic snicker; and when the truck had "straightened out" for the gallop down the avenue, Pim looked over his shoulder for an explanation.

Fuchs said, with a wink and a leer: "The blaze's down where Kitty Slogan lives."

Now Pim knew that there had been a quarrel between Fuchs and Morphy: and he understood, too, that they had fought about a girl. But he had thought, from what he had heard of the truck-house gossip, that her name was "Rosie;" and he gathered now, from Fuchs's manner, that she was "Kitty Slogan." He did not know that there had been two girls in the affair,

THE SMOKE - EATERS

and that Fuchs had maliciously stirred up a jealousy between them, to the greater misery of young Morphy.

Pim grunted, and turned a disgusted back on this introduction of sentiment and a woman into the business of the fire department. It was like such young fools as Fuchs and Morphy to be mixing their "girling" with the serious affairs of life. He got their measure in a memory of himself, in his first uniform, walking the longest way home to his meals on days when the wind would show the red lining in his blue coat-tails, eying his shadow on the sidewalk before him, and kicking up the bottoms of his trouser-legs with a swagger as he strutted past the admiration of the petticoats of the quarter. Pish!

Then Fuchs said: "It's her corner, all right;" and Pim snorted hotly. Suppose it was her corner! Did that make any difference to *them*? Their business was with

PRIVATE MORPHY'S ROMANCE

the fire, not with any tow-headed Irish girl that might be in it.

Morphy was hanging out from the step again, bending forward now in an eagerness that seemed to find the progress of the truck too slow for him. Pim clapped a hand on his shoulder.

“ Look here,” he said, “ *you* put yer rubbers on an’ atten’ to business.”

Morphy drew back in an abashed consciousness of his excitement, and began to busy himself with the difficulties of getting into his rubber coat and of balancing himself at the same time against the lurches of the truck.

“ An’ if I ketch yuh goin’ anywhere without orders,” Pim warned him, “ I’ll report yuh to the ol’ man. See? ”

Morphy waved a muffled arm through the tangle of his coat, but did not answer.

Pim turned to Fuchs. “ That’s fer *you*, too,” he added.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

Fuchs laughed. "I'm not doin' any grand-stand stunts."

"See yuh don't," Pim replied, sourly — to have the last word — and swung out to look down the street.

He could see the red-brick fronts of a block of tenement-houses glowing out of the darkness ahead, in the footlight glare of a blaze that was curling two tongues of flame out from the sashless lower windows and licking in open insolence up the wall. A crowd in the street broke into a shout when they saw the truck.

"Ol' man Slogan has the fourth floor," Fuchs said.

Pim cursed at the headway the fire had gained. "Cop asleep again," he muttered. "An' there ain't a line of hose here yet."

The driver began to draw in his horses. Captain Meaghan called, from his high place on the "turn-table": "Get your twenty-footers ready, boys!" And they tossed

PRIVATE MORPHY'S ROMANCE

back into the truck the hooks and axes with which they had been arming themselves, and attacked their ladder-pins.

Pim and Morphy unbuckled the life-net to free their "twenty-footer," and heaved the half-moon of tarpaulin out on the sidewalk as the truck swerved into the curb with a grinding of brakes. They had their ladder down before the horses had stopped pawing and slipping on the gutter ice. And they drove it through the sidewalk crowd with the aid of their fellows, and raised it beside the third story window, out of the reach of the flames, while Captain Meaghan was still shouting behind them at the men that had manned the opposite side of the truck.

Pim turned the neck-guard of his helmet over his face, and ran up the rungs, his head down, his shoulders high, into the heat. It was his work — and that of the man who followed — to break in the windows of the third floor and save the occupants of it, if

THE SMOKE - EATERS

there were any smothering in their sleep inside. Lieutenant Gallegher was scaling the other ladder to the same end. Captain Meaghan was running to the doorway with axe and lantern.

Young Morphy, biting his lip at the foot of Pim's ladder, looked up at the sergeant, looked back at the truck where the axes were, and then darted away, empty-handed, after Captain Meaghan, and caught up to him at the door. And Fuchs, grinning and mischievous, followed his victim.

In the gas-light of the narrow hallway, a group of frightened women screamed and wept.

Captain Meaghan charged into them with a shout that drove them back on Morphy. A frantic mother among them—screeching, “Ach, Mr. Morphy, safe my Rosie! Safe my Rosie!”—caught at the private; and before he could get himself freed from her hysterical clutch, Fuchs

PRIVATE MORPHY'S ROMANCE

and the captain were half-way up the stairs ahead of him.

She was the mother of the "Rosie" of whom Pim had heard; and Fuchs looked back at Morphy with a grin which no smoke could hide. Morphy reddened and went after him, leaping up the steps. And then there rushed out upon the landing above them a young woman, barefooted, and wrapped in a greatcoat; and at sight of her he stumbled and stopped short.

It was "Rosie." She gave a little squeal as she came, and threw herself fainting into the arms of the captain. But Meaghan had a veteran fire-fighter's knowledge of hysteria, and a practical, if somewhat rough, method of treatment for it. He caught her by the collar of her coat, lifted her to her feet, and shook her back to her senses. "Now *you* walk down those stairs," he ordered, "or I'll *throw* yuh down!" And he spoke in that angry blare of voice of which Pim has

THE SMOKE - EATERS

said that it would "start an automobubble out of a baulk."

She clutched the balustrade and sidled down past him, her face as if blurred of any intelligent expression by her fear, and her eyes goggled in a gaping stare at him. She looked at the shamefaced Morphy as she went by him, and he shrank back against the wall with a mutter of apology. If *he* had been in Captain Meaghan's place —

Fuchs grinned down at them, chuckling in a malicious enjoyment of the situation. And Morphy sprang at him with an oath.

It is certain that there would have been a fight between them there, but Fuchs was the nimbler, and he reached the dense smoke of the landing just as Captain Meaghan broke open a door and disappeared into the doorway with his lantern.

Fuchs dodged in after him; and Morphy, blinded by his anger, ran at full tilt along the hallway to the foot of the next

PRIVATE MORPHY'S ROMANCE

flight of stairs, dashed past a flaming doorway, and headed up toward the Slogan flat.

The gas was burning dimly in the smoke there; and the hall was empty. He looked about him, breathing heavily, until — with the sudden understanding that he had got ahead of the others — he turned to leap up the last steps to the Slogan door and beat a thunder of blows on it with his fist. He got no answer.

He put his shoulder against the flimsy pine, and tried to force the lock. It gave, but held him. He stood back and butted his side into it with his full weight; and the catch snapping unexpectedly, he fell sprawling into the parlor beside a table on which an oil-lamp was burning serenely, in a home-like privacy and quiet.

There was a cry of fright from within. He scrambled to his feet, caught up the lamp, and rushed into the next room with it. And

THE SMOKE - EATERS

there "Kitty" Slogan sat up in bed, the coverlet clutched to her chin, screaming.

She stopped with a gasp when she recognized him, and she flushed to the eyes. He backed into the doorway, putting up a hand to fumble off his helmet. "I—I," he said. "The—the house 's afire."

She steadied a fluttering breath.

"Thank you," she replied, in a voice that shook under a tone of icy politeness. "You could 've told me that without scarin' me to death."

He had expected her to behave as Rosie had; and he blinked stupidly at her in the sudden right-about of his hopes. He wiped his forehead. "Yuh'd better tell the folks," he said.

"My parents 're not in, Mr. Morphy," she replied.

Her manner stopped him on the dead center. He could neither go forward nor get himself turned back. He looked at her

PRIVATE MORPHY'S ROMANCE

helplessly. She said: "Will you please get out o' here?"

A burst of smoke, blowing in from below stairs, made a blue halo around the light. He put the lamp down meekly, and went out, his helmet in his hand. But as soon as his eyes were off her, a proper resentment of her treatment of him blazed up from the smoulder of Fuchs's persecution, and he clapped his hat on with a growl.

It was all Fuchs's work—the little catfish! And that was all he was, a catfish! He was as black as one; he had the grin of one; he was barbed like one, with a Guinny mustache; and he was as slippery, and as low-down, dirt-mean as one. What business was it of his if this "Rosie" *had* been making eyes at a fellow private around the gable of her nose, as she went past the truck-house door. And what but the lowest cussedness had prompted the little rat—that day when he was on the desk, and Kitty Slogan

THE SMOKE - EATERS

had come with a word for " Mr. Morphy " — had prompted him to call up-stairs " Morphy! Morphy! Here's a message from *Rosie* for yuh! " Of course she had demanded to know who " Rosie " was. Darn him! It had served him right that he had had his face punched for that.

Morphy grasped the balustrade in the hall and leaned over to glower down the stairs in the hope that Fuchs might be coming up alone. He imagined his own big fist covering and eclipsing Fuchs's broad grin in the blow that would meet him as he rose beaming on the landing; and that mental picture was so vivid that for a moment it outshone the glare below — a glare which leaped and lightened in a draft of burning gases that came flaming up the stairs with the crackling of a brush-wood bonfire.

He understood the situation when the heat took him in the throat and nostrils with a burning choke of suffocation. He jumped

PRIVATE MORPHY'S ROMANCE

back, snorting the "scorch" from his nose; and he ran in for Kitty Slogan with a yell of "Stairs afire!" that was lost in the banging of the hall door as he flung it shut behind him.

She screamed frantically, "Go away, you! Go away!" and slammed the bedroom door in his face.

"Look here," he called, hoarsely, in the darkness, "we got to get out o' here—quick."

She cried back, — with that excess of coolness which has caused as many deaths by fire as the blindest fright, — "You can get out of here just as quick as you like."

"D'yuh want to jump out of a fourth story window?" he demanded.

She did not answer. He heard her bustling about inside.

"Yuh'll have to get a move on if yuh *don't*," he said.

She called out, on a high trembling note of

THE SMOKE - EATERS

defiance: " Why ain't yuh lookin' after ' Rosie' ? "

He took that retort—as he had taken the puff of heat over the balustrade—in a breath of indignation through the nose; and he took it, too, as a proof that there was a pique and spirit in her that blocked his way as surely as the flame in the staircase. It was useless to argue with her.

He turned back toward the front windows, stumbling with curses against the furniture. He reached a blind and tore it from its roller, savagely; and the glare from without leaped into the room, red and threatening. He threw up the sash and looked out.

The house was three windows in width; and of the three directly below him, two were already in flames. The third was dark with smoke. It was to this last one that Pim's ladder had been raised. And Morphy knew that no ladder could remain there long.

PRIVATE MORPHY'S ROMANCE

He shouted and ran back to the hall door. As soon as he opened it, the heat and flame struck into his eyes like an explosion. He slammed it shut, and dashed back to the bedroom. "Come out o' that!" he cried, breaking in on her. "Unless yuh want—"

She was buttoning the waist of her gown. She screamed, "How dare you!" stamping on the floor.

He tore a blanket off the bed and made to throw it about her. She struck at him with an open hand and dealt him a futile blow on the side of the head; but before she could make another movement he smothered her in the blanket, spun her around in the entangling folds of it, pinned down her arms, and, stooping, drew her forward to fall, head-down like a practice "dummy," over his shoulder.

She screamed a muffled protest, as he rose with her. He hitched her up on his shoulder as if she were a bag of oats.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

He came panting to the window. He shouted "Hi! Hi!" to Pim, who was clambering out of a third story window in a cloud of smoke.

Pim looked up. "Who's that?" he called.

Morphy shouted: "Me — I'm cut off here — with a girl!"

"Huh! Serves yuh right," Pim grunted. He raised his voice: "Get over to this other window here." (He added to himself: "An' be darn quick about it;" for the fire was growing in the room which he had left.)

Morphy carried his struggling load through the door of a little room off the parlor, and found the third window. He fought with the tight sash of it, but he could not raise it with a single hand. He swore angrily at the girl, and swung his elbow into the pane to send it crashing down on Pim. At the same moment he heard the explosion of the fire in the room under his feet. He climbed out

PRIVATE MORPHY'S ROMANCE

on the sill as quickly as he could. He was too late. The flames were so fierce in the window below him that Pim had been driven down from it.

It was impossible to put up a scaling-ladder through the blaze. It would be a neck-breaking leap from such a height for any but an expert in the use of the life-net. And before the extension-ladder could be raised, the fire would be all around them.

Pim shouted to the men in the street: "Here, boys! Here, you! Push this ladder out from the bricks. Get yer hooks an' hold it steady."

Three of the men ran to get under the slant of the ladder and raise it out from the window, while three others braced the foot of it. Two with hooks propped it, as telegraph linemen prop the pole which they are raising. Pim climbed like an acrobat to the swaying top, twined a leg among the

THE SMOKE - EATERS

upper rungs, and looked up through the drift of heat and smoke.

He threw down his helmet and peeled off his rubber coat.

“ Now! ” he called. “ Swing her out an’ drop her between me an’ th’ wall. Quick! ”

The noises in the street hushed to a trembling silence of throbbing steam pumps. Morphy straddled the sill and swung her out limp. He held her a moment under the arms. He let her go, with a gasp.

She fell, fluttering in her blanket, into the smoke. The head of the ladder sank into the flames and was sprung out at once by the men below. And then it was seen that Pim, catching her about the knees in a football tackle, had taken her weight on his shoulders and his back, and held her safe.

The people in the street shouted and waved their arms as Pim came slowly down the ladder with her. A squad of men ran up with a life-net for Morphy; and he jumped

PRIVATE MORPHY'S ROMANCE

and lit in it before the crowd had ceased its buzz of excited comment on the rescue of the girl, and looked to see what had become of him.

He ran over to where Kitty Slogan stood, supported by two policemen, her hand to her forehead. "Are yuh hurt, Kitty?" he cried.

She drew herself up from a trembling droop and looked over her shoulder at him with a face that sent him back to his company with his eyes on his feet.

Fuchs, who had watched the passage between them, hummed innocently, as Morphy went by:

"Rosie, you are my posie,
You are my rag-time gal."

But Morphy was either too bewildered to notice it, or too weak now to resent it.

The fire was not put out until midnight; and for three hours afterward Company

THE SMOKE - EATERS

No. 0 remained at work with hooks and axes tearing up floors and stripping walls for the last smoulder and spark of the blaze. When the final "washing-down" had been accomplished, and the last companies withdrew, Morphy and Pim were among those detailed to watch the wrecked rooms for any reappearance of the fire; and that was how it happened that the simple-hearted Morphy, sitting alone with Pim and a lantern in the ruins of the Slogan parlor, came to tell the sergeant the details of his love-affairs, and ask his advice on the ending of them. There was this "Rosie" who would not speak to him because he had not carried her downstairs; and there was Kitty Slogan "turned me down," he said, "because I done just *that*." What was a man to make of such a tangle?

Pim listened with a smile — the long, slow smile of the man who sets up to be a philosopher, and takes life with a twinkle in the eye.

PRIVATE MORPHY'S ROMANCE

“ Well,” he said, “ when I was new to this business, I read a story about a poor young fireman — with an ol’ mother to keep — that saved the millionaire’s only daughter and married the money. An’ that was flarin’ fine skywash fer the picture paper, but it was a pipe-dream. You pick a girl out of a warm bunk, an’ load her over yer shoulder, an’ climb out of a window with her, — cussin’ her ’cause she’s pig-squealin’ an’ cat-scratchin’ an’ clawin’ her hooks into yer gills, — an’ she won’t love yuh any mor’n if she’d never had her fingers in yer mouth. Not any! ”

He turned the cud of fine-cut in his cheek. Morphy pleaded: “ But — ”

“ But,” Pim said, “ there’s another aspeck of the business, an’ that’s this: Kitty Slogan, — if it’s Kitty fer yours ” (Morphy nodded eagerly enough) — “ Well, Kitty Slogan er any other girl in this quarter ain’t goin’ to say ‘ No ’ to a business

THE SMOKE - EATERS

proposition from any man with *your* job. 'Cause why? 'Cause a fireman gets good pay — 'cause he ain't aroun' the house, 'exceptin' at meals, an' *them* he eats standin' — 'cause he keeps steady — an' when he's old he goes out on half-pay — an' when he don't *get* old, she draws his pension. That's why!

“ If you want my advice, young man, quit yer philanderin' an' go to the lady with straight talk. Up an' say: ‘ Sis! I got enough fer two to live on. D'*you* want to help squander my pay? ’ An' if she don't say ‘ You bet! ’ I don't know no more about women than you do.”

And the subsequent event showed that Pim knew.

V

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

HE came into Captain Meaghan's office about noon, carrying his turn-out of fire-hat and rubbers in a bran-sack over his shoulder. He wore his cap slanted down on an ear that had been nipped and scarred with fire. He had the face of a veteran from the regular army in the West, deep-eyed and lean, as if heat and exposure had tried him out to bone and sinew. He introduced himself briefly: "I'm Brunton. I been transferred here." And the captain was so absorbed in an admiring scrutiny of this un-beautiful recruit that he did not answer.

From the tales he had heard of Brunton, he had expected a thick-set, burly gorilla;

THE SMOKE - EATERS

and Brunton was tall and loose. His neck rose from his collar as long as the neck of a plucked turkey; and he had a trick of hitching up his chin, every now and then, with a nervous twist of that neck, as if his collar pinched him.

It was a mannerism that appealed to Meaghan for obscure reasons. (It had been the mannerism of a friend of his earlier days — a red-headed daredevil of a boy who had led the “gang” to which Meaghan had belonged.) “Feelin’ all right again?” he asked, affably.

“Yes’r,” Brunton said. “Feelin’ fine. Much doin’?”

“No. Not much. What kep’ yuh late?”

Brunton replied vaguely that there had been a delay about his transfer papers. The captain accepted that unsatisfactory explanation without suspicion, and swung around in his swivel desk-chair. “Gallegher ’ll fix yuh up when he comes in,” he said. “Yuh’ll

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

find the boys up-stairs." And having waited for Brunton to go out, he drew a cigar from his pocket and presented it to himself with an air of flattered self-congratulation. For Brunton was the popular "hero" of the whole fire department.

He had been only eighteen months in service, but already he had been entered seven times on the Roll of Merit. He had first distinguished himself, as Meaghan remembered, by climbing up the back of a burning house, without a scaling-ladder, from sill to shutter and from shutter to molding, to rescue a child from a third story window. He had made himself famous in the department by diving into the steaming drip of a flooded cellar to bring out a suffocated pipeman. He had made himself famous with the public by crawling in among the burning timbers of a house that had collapsed and working there with ax and hand-saw for an hour — a stream of water playing on him to keep his clothes

THE SMOKE - EATERS

from catching fire — until he had released a fireman who had been pinned down in the wreckage.

He had been a scout in “ th’ Injun wars,” it was said. He could lift the tail of a five-ton truck “ with his shoulder.” He could go down the leader pipe from a burning roof “ like a Guinny’s monk.” In short, there was nothing that he could not do — if he had not already done it; and Captain Meaghan, thinking over these things, smoked and smiled.

He had no misgivings. Latterly he had been receiving all clumsy probationers as recruits; it was a new and grateful compliment to have a Brunton transferred to his rolls. He had no suspicions. Brunton had been injured in his last exploit, and had been sent to the Bronx to rest in the comparative quiet of a suburban engine-house; this was his return to active duty evidently. The captain smoked and smiled.

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

He was still smoking when his lieutenant returned from dinner; but the look of complacent satisfaction had left his face, and he was listening impatiently to the shouts of laughter that sounded from the sitting-room up-stairs.

“Brunton’s here,” he said. “See what’s goin’ on up there.”

Lieutenant Gallegher hung up his coat and cap, and went to investigate. The noise stopped at once.

He came back with his face divided between a smile and a frown.

“It’s just that Brunton,” he reported. “He’s been showing them a trick of swallowing money—and then bringing it up again.”

“*Brun-ton?*” Meaghan said, with a surprised scowl.

Gallegher laughed apologetically. “Well, it was Donnelly’s fault, I guess. Brunton was doing it to catch Donnelly.”

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“ Huh! ” the captain grunted, mollified.
“ Donnelly, was it? ”

The lieutenant nodded. “ He said Brunton was palming the money, and wasn’t swallowing it. And Brunton stumped him to mark a quarter and give it to him. And he swallowed it all right, but now he says he can’t get it up again — and Donnelly’s out twenty-five cents.”

The captain’s mouth twitched. “ Serve him right. Donnelly’s been gettin’ too wise ’round here anyway. He thinks he knows it all. Serve him right.” He reached for his cap. “ Give Brunton the bed down by the window an’ move Donnelly up nearer the pole.”

He went out for his three hours off duty — being a “ one-mealer ” — and Lieutenant Gallegher drew a package of “ fine-cut ” from his hip-pocket, rolled a ball of it between thumb and forefinger, and sat down to chew over his doubts of Brunton.

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

It was evident that the new man was a "peculiar genius," as Sergeant Pim, privately interrogated, had confessed; and it was evident, too, that his reputation gave him a prestige among the men that would be powerful for good or evil. Gallegher had tempered old Meaghan's absolutism by allowing the men a degree of liberty in their leisure hours and a license of unusual freedom during the captain's absence every afternoon from two o'clock till five. He began to fear that Brunton might lead in an abuse of the company's privileges, and he listened with uneasiness to the growing uproar that began to echo from above stairs.

The sallow Donnelly — "Long Tom" Donnelly — put his head in the door, in the midst of these reflections. "That man's crazy," he said. "He's sittin' up there with strips of paper pasted all over his face an' a paper funnel on his nose, makin' faces at himself."

THE SMOKE - EATERS

Gallegher recognized the personal bias of this report, and said nothing. "Long Tom" shrugged a shoulder, and withdrew.

Sergeant Pim dropped in, quite casually, a moment later. "Brunton's a reg'lar goat!" he laughed. "He's got 'Long Tom' on the run, pretendin' he's crazy. It's 's good 's a nigger show up there."

"Don't let him get too gay, Pim," the lieutenant said. "He'll be making trouble for us all with the old man, if he ain't careful."

Pim dutifully smoothed out his grin. "Oh, he's all right. It's been pretty slow fer 'm up in the Bronx, I guess. He's feelin' his oats, gettin' back down-town. . . . He's after Donnelly, that's all. Donnelly tried to come the lofty on him, an' he wouldn't stand fer it."

The lieutenant shifted his cud. "Tell him to go slow on it," he said, somewhat reassured.

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

“ Sure,” Pim promised. “ He’s all right.”

The lieutenant rested on that promise until another of the men, on his way out to his dinner, looked in, laughing, to report. “ Brunton’s more fun ’n a cage of kittens,” he said. “ Pim’s puttin’ him on to Donnelly — gettin’ back at him fer settin’ the cop wise on that trick he played the kike down the street. He’s got ‘ Long Tom ’ goin’ fer fair.”

“ Pim has?” Gallegher said.

He knew of the bitterness between Pim and Donnelly. He knew that if Pim saw in Brunton an agent of retaliation, there would be no limit to the fool’s play he would instigate. That was the known defect in Pim; he was wise in the affairs of his profession, but outside of them he was as irresponsible and mischievous as a schoolboy.

There was nothing now for Gallegher to do but to wait until the men went beyond

THE SMOKE - EATERS

bounds and then to repress them with a prompt show of authority.

He waited.

In the meantime, from sleight-of-hand and coin-swallowing, Brunton had gone to uproarious foolery; he had badgered the contemptuous Donnelly until "Long Tom" had gone down-stairs in disgust to look after the horses; and he proposed, now, that he should startle Donnelly by sliding down the hay-chute to him, from the storeroom to the ground floor, feet first. His audience did not suppose that he would dare to do it, and encouraged him jocularly, until—in the face of Pim's warning that he would either stick in the walls and smother, or drop down the two stories and break his legs—he got into the chute, cried "Here goes nuthin'," and disappeared.

The crazy daredeviltry of it left the men standing snickering guiltily at one another. "Gad!" Pim said. "We'd better get down

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

an' get a hearse." And they swarmed down the sliding-poles after him to the ground floor.

They were met by Donnelly, who came running to the stairs with the expression of a man who has seen insanity. Behind him came Brunton, covered with the dust of the chute, his shirt-sleeves torn at the elbows and his fingers cut. "I'll fix yuh," he was saying. "I'll cut yer heart out. Crazy am I? By Crikey Mike, I'll fix yuh. Crazy am I? I'll blow yer brains out. By Crikey Mike!"

He winked at the men, and went after Donnelly, muttering crazily. And the crew dodged behind the truck and struggled with the agonies of their unrelieved laughter, bent double, or leaning helplessly against the wall, choking and shaking in silent convulsions.

Donnelly burst in on the lieutenant with a sputtering excited account of the affair;

THE SMOKE - EATERS

and Gallagher heard him out without comment. "I can't interfere," the lieutenant said, doggedly. "As soon as he does something against rules, I can call him down. But I can't, until he does. Leave him alone. Keep away from him."

"Well, I'm tryin' to keep away from him," Donnelly protested, "an' he's chasin' me all over the place."

The lieutenant took up his newspaper. "I can't help it," he repeated. "You'll have to fix it up between yourselves."

Donnelly went back to his persecution, and it proceeded in a conspiracy of silence which all the men joined. It endured without official notice until Captain Meaghan had returned; and the lieutenant was already congratulating himself on the end of the trouble when Donnelly came back in desperation to the office to report that Brunton was threatening to shoot him. "He's crazy!" he insisted. "He's crazy! An'

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

he's got a gun in his clothes at that. He's crazy!"

Captain Meaghan, taken unawares, glared at him in astonishment.

Gallegher asked: "Did you see the gun?"

"You ask Pim," Donnelly cried. "*He* saw it. He tol' me —"

"Pim's playing you, I guess," the lieutenant said.

The captain found his voice to demand suddenly: "Who's crazy?"

"Brunton is!" Donnelly answered. "Pim tol' me —"

Captain Meaghan leaned forward at him, grasping the arms of his chair. "You go 'n mind yer own bus'ness, see?" he said. "Yuh're a pin-head. That's all that's wrong with *you*. Yuh 're no good. It'd take a whole crew of *you*, an' a battalion chief, to make a man like Brunton. You get out of here an' shut yer holler."

THE SMOKE - EATERS

Donnelly swallowed and made as if to speak.

“ Shut up — an’ *get out!* ” Meaghan ordered, in a voice that fairly blew “ Long Tom ” backwards out of the door.

“ Blamed yellow cur,” the captain muttered. “ Comin’ ’round here with a whine like that! ”

Lieutenant Gallegher did not reply. And for the rest of the day Donnelly suffered dumbly an organized persecution that allowed no echo of Brunton’s horse-play to reach the office.

But, at eleven o’clock that night — when peace seemed to have settled down with darkness on the house, and the bunk-room was as quiet as a nursery asleep, and there was not so much as a snore to disturb the dimly lit repose of the hypocrites in their white cots — a shot exploded on the stillness with a stab of flame and a deafening echo. A

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

scream of terror wailed up after it, horribly shrill. A roar of laughter followed in a tremendous guffaw, and rose in the half-light with a volume that shook the walls. The captain's door flew open before a bray of anger. Donnelly, crouching in the aisle between the cots, greeted him with an indignant "He's tryin' to ass-ass-inate me!" And the room rang with the haw-haws of the men who could no longer struggle with the convulsions that shook and twisted them as if they had all been taken with fits.

Captain Meaghan shouted at them in vain until the lieutenant turned up the gas-jets on the pandemonium, and the men, surprised by the light, smothered themselves in their pillows and choked down their laughter to a suppressed and spasmodic snorting and grunting. The captain—standing in the doorway in his underclothes, his gray hair tousled from the pillow—swore at them in a wrathful bewilderment.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“ Long Tom ” Donnelly stammered unintelligibly and pointed at Brunton; and Brunton, sitting up in his bed, stared in the wildest bewilderment.

“ Wha — what’s up? ” he asked.

At that innocent inquiry, Sergeant Pim rolled out of his bed in his blankets and writhed helplessly on the floor, drumming with his heels on the linoleum. Brunton looked around at him and blinked.

“ Who fired that? ” Captain Meaghan cried.

“ He-e-e did! ” Donnelly screamed. “ I seen him. I was watchin’ him. He’s been threatenin’ — ”

“ Shut up! ” Meaghan ordered.

He bore down on Brunton with his hands clenched.

“ Did yuh? ”

Brunton shook his head, open-mouthed. “ No,” he said. “ I was asleep. I — ” He looked about him at the men, shaking under

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

their bedclothes. "What's the matter?" he asked, mildly.

Sergeant Pim, on the floor, squealed in another spasm, and the men, who had been holding themselves in to listen, went off again into hysterics as if they had been a class of boarding-school girls. Meaghan leaped around at them with the purple face of a man on the verge of apoplexy; and he was still struggling with an oath that stuck in his throat, when the "jigger" on the wall clicked and struck.

If it had been a cry of "Fire!" to a theatre audience roaring at a farce, or the warning shot of an outpost to a company of soldiers singing around a camp-fire, it could not have made a more sudden silence. The men started up, on their elbows. The captain stopped with his hand in the air, dropped it and turned. The bell clanged out its swift strokes, and paused—and the men were out of their beds and kicking into

THE SMOKE - EATERS

their boots and trousers before it could complete the alarm.

Sergeant Pim followed Brunton down the sliding-pole, and leaped with him to the truck. "Where'd yuh get the gun?" the sergeant asked out of the corner of his mouth.

Brunton leaned over to answer, behind his hand, "Up in the Bronx. I had to carry one. Dunk Cooper's gang was after me."

Pim whispered, "What'd yuh do with it?"

Brunton winked and laughed. "I got it here."

And while they were still laughing, the catastrophe began to develop.

On account of the disorder in the bunk-room and the consequent unreadiness of the men to respond to the alarm, the man on watch had been left unaided to lock the collars and hook the bit-snaps of the three horses as they charged down on him from their stalls; and while he had been still

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

struggling with the last of them, "Long Tom" Donnelly had sprung into the driver's seat, so excited that he did not wait for the word of command before he jerked on the reins, brought down the harness on the horses' backs, and started them out. The watchman had time only to jump aside from their heads; he had not time to make sure that the doors had been slid back to the walls; and the hub of a front wheel struck an edge-strip that was projecting from the door-frame, and smashed through the heavy timber with a noise that frightened the horses and a shock that almost threw Captain Meaghan from his place on the "turntable." He shouted at Donnelly and confused him the more; and the truck, turning too sharply, swung its rear wheels wide over the sidewalk and dropped them with a jolt from the curbstone to the gutter.

Brunton grunted: "'S worse 'n ridin' strip-saddle!" He tightened his belt. In

THE SMOKE - EATERS

a few moments, he added: "Lickety split! Crikey Mike!" — for the horses were leaping along in a furious gallop. He leaned out from the side-step to see the off horse plunging ahead. He heard Meaghan cry: "Hold 'em in! Hold 'em in!"

Donnelly answered, through his teeth: "Somethin's loose!"

They spun past a corner light with all the men craning their necks to see. Captain Meaghan shouted: "Hell! That bit ain't snapped! The center horse!"

The truck began to swing dangerously from side to side. Lieutenant Gallegher turned to the men. "Look out, now, boys," he said.

"What's the matter?" Brunton asked Pim.

The sergeant answered: "They're off. 'Baby' in the lead. Her bit ain't snapped."

The three horses, running wild, were pounding out the confused clatter of a stam-

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

pede over asphalt and paving-stones, instead of that regular pulse of hoof-beats which times the speed of a well-reined gallop. Donnelly, braced and straining, clung to the lines, but the pull was all against him, and the great animals jerked and tore at his arms as they rose and fell. He was being dragged, not they driven; and they were dragging him straight for the water-front, down a sloping street so narrow that it was impossible, going at such speed, to turn a corner from it.

The captain reached forward and hooked the leather strap that held Donnelly to the seat. "Get both feet on the brakes," he said. "Hang on to them."

"Long Tom" did not need the order. He was bent forward, bareheaded, his face set to the rush of air. He was as cool, now, as a railroad engineer watching the tracks ahead; but the brakes were useless to stop a ten-thousand pound truck running on ball-

THE SMOKE - EATERS

bearings behind three deep-chested, mighty-flanked fire-horses gone mad together. They shot past the pillars of an elevated road; and the truck took the car tracks with the bound of a toboggan. Another electric light whipped past them; the shadows of another dark street leaped to swallow them like the mouth of a tunnel; and there were only two more streets between them and the piers.

Captain Meaghan pushed back his helmet from his forehead, and looked around at his lieutenant as if hoping for the suggestion of some aid; and he saw Brunton swing nimbly up from the step to the other side of the turntable, and peer out at the horses.

“ What’re yuh doin’? ” Meaghan called.

His voice was lost in that clang and roar and rattle of jolting wheels and ringing pavement and clamoring bell. Brunton did not notice him, but dropped his head into his shoulders like a cat, and went forward

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

around the turntable until he was crouched at Donnelly's knee.

He jumped forward and disappeared.

The captain turned to catch up a lantern, but a lurch of the truck almost threw him from his hold, and he could only cling helplessly to the iron upright and wait for a corner light. As one flashed by, it showed Brunton astride of the off horse, working forward to its shoulders. Before the darkness closed again, he had reached its mane and stretched himself out along its neck to catch the bridle of the middle horse.

Captain Meaghan understood that he was trying to pull its head around and throw it, as a cavalryman throws his mount. But he understood also that this was the 1,600-pound filly of a mixed-blood Percheron mare, and as strong in the neck as a bull; and Brunton had not even the purchase of a bit to aid him. When the feeble gaslights of half the block had flowed past, without any

THE SMOKE - EATERS

slackening of speed, Meaghan gave up hope. "He can't do it," he groaned. "Run 'em into somethin', Tom."

Before Donnelly could answer, there was a flash of fire at the horses' heads, and a shot rang out above the noises of hoof and wheel. A second report cut the echo of the first. The middle horse leaped and fell kicking. It was dragged between the poles, on the asphalt, until it brought down the nigh horse. The truck swept them forward, in a struggling heap, with broken poles and snapped harness, until the third horse fell, too; and then the front wheels jammed into them and stopped the truck with a lurch that shot Meaghan forward as he leaped. He lit on his feet and ran to the poles. "Bring a light," he cried, forcing down the head of the struggling nigh horse with his knee. "Brunton?" he said, hoarsely. "Brunton?"

There was no answer. Lieutenant Galle-

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

gher and the men ran up with lanterns. "Loose those flank horses," Meaghan cried. "He must be 'n underneath." The men began to unbuckle the tangled straps. "Cut them! Cut them!" he ordered.

He reached down to raise the head of the bleeding animal that Brunton had shot. Lieutenant Gallegher touched him on the shoulder. "Brunton's over there, on the curb," he said; and Meaghan turned to see the missing fireman sitting beside the gutter, painfully nursing a bruised shoulder.

It was plain from Brunton's expression that he was pretending to be more hurt than he really was; and below his exaggerated grimace of pain, there was a sheepish look of guilt. Captain Meaghan stared in surprise and bewilderment. And then he remembered that forgotten incident in the truck-house, and he understood Brunton's expression, and his face changed.

He drew a long breath. In the silence,

THE SMOKE - EATERS

one of the men snickered hysterically. Meaghan shouted at Brunton: "You're a liar! *You* fired that in the bunk-room!"—and threw up his hands and swung a passionate kick into a lantern that stood at his feet.

It rose flaming, fell with a crash of broken glass, and went out. In the darkness, the men heard his profanity choke in his throat. He coughed. He said, in a moment: "Fix those horses an' let's get out o' here."

Three hours later, the men had returned to their quarters, a very dark and solemn crew. Captain Meaghan had not spoken a word to them. He had gone up-stairs to his office without even stopping to look at the two lamed horses or to examine the truck; and when Gallegher followed him, twenty minutes afterward, he found him sitting dumb before his open journal, a dry pen in his hand, and the lid of the ink-well still unlifted.

Gallegher waited. Meaghan did not move.

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

“ Better leave that till the morning, I guess, sir,” the lieutenant said.

Meaghan reached out quickly, dipped his pen and drew a shaky black line through Brunton’s name on the roll. “ Brunton goes back to the goose pastures,” he growled. “ Take Donnelly off the seat an’ put him on the tiller again.”

Gallegher waited. “ What about Pim? ”

Meaghan swung around to him. “ Pim? What’s he got to do with it? ”

Gallegher said: “ His monkey-shinin’s at the bottom of the whole thing. I know he didn’t mean any harm, but he started Brunton going in the first place.”

Meaghan threw down his pen. “ Well, darn my eyes,” he cried. “ I’m captain of a crew of fools. I’m up against it! ”

There was a suspiciously timely tap at the door, and Gallegher opened it to find the shamefaced Pim standing on the threshold. “ Well? ” Meaghan growled.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

The sergeant took off his cap and slunk in guiltily. "Cap'n," he said, "if there's goin' to be any trouble about this thing, I want to take my share of it. I —"

"You get out of here," Meaghan ordered. "You're the — — 'fool that didn't know it was loaded.' I'll lose my job through *you* some o' these days, Pim, but it's no good talkin'. You're too old to get sense. Go on. Go to bed."

Pim nodded solemnly. "That's right, cap'n. That'll hold me fer awhile. That's right. I'm a — ol' fool. I'm a — ol' — —! That's right." He went out abusing himself vilely. "Good night," he said, and shut the door.

Captain Meaghan put an unlighted cigar in his mouth, rolled it over between his lips, and shook his head blankly. "That's the second time," he said. "That's the second time I been up against a man that wasn't scared of nuthin'. An' they don't do — they

IN THE NATURE OF A HERO

don't do. . . . I might 've knowed Brunton couldn't 've done the things he's done an' have good sense. I might 've knowed it. . . . These here — heroes — ” He shut his journal with a bang. “ I don't want no more of them! They're no good! They're no — good! ”

VI

CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION

CORRIGAN had been the motorman of a "Metropolitan" electric car, and he had been discharged from the service of the street railway company for wrecking his trolley in a collision with a fire-engine. He had felt that the fire department owed him a living, having deprived him of one; and the political influence of his brother-in-law helped the commissioner to pay the debt. The railway thereby lost a motorman who could run down a crowded street with a controller full ahead, and who cracked his gongs frequently by dancing frantic fandangoes on the "ringers" of them when the heavy goods trucks got on his tracks; and

CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION

the department gained a probationer who loved excitement as a collie dog loves an open field, who could handle a forty-pound scaling-ladder from the shoulder, with the muscles that had skidded car-wheels when he screwed down brakes, and who went up a windowed wall or took the 35-foot jump into the life-net, in probationers' drills at Headquarters, with the smile of the days when he had played "Cops an' Crooks" through an East Side lumber-yard.

His term of probation was all pure sport for him. He spent his days at Headquarters and his nights at the engine-house in Harlem to which he had been provisionally assigned. He worked off ten pounds of fat, and he clipped his drooping black mustache until it stood out in a fierce bristle under his huge beak of nose. His comrades called him "Bull," and he pawed at them in a bear-cub playfulness that left them bruised about the forearms. He was happy. He had but

THE SMOKE - EATERS

one cause of dissatisfaction: the Harlem engine-house was not a school of arduous training, and he wished a more exciting life. He saw a prospect of it when he received his appointment as a fourth-grade fireman detailed to fill a vacancy in Captain Meaghan's command; and he chewed the roots of his mustache with one corner of his mouth and smiled crookedly out of the other. "You'll straighten your mug before you've finished with that," they warned him. He straightened it forthwith, in a grin that curled evenly on both sides of his nose. "I guess yuh're right, all right," he said, and nodded.

He reported for duty on the following day, and Captain Meaghan looked him over with an official glare. He saluted clumsily and stood stiff, knowing the captain by reputation as a gruff disciplinarian.

Meaghan said: "How much d'yuh weigh?"

CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION

“ One ninety, sir,” Corrigan answered.

He groaned. “ One ninety? D’yuh know that truck weighs near ten thousand pounds a’ready? ”

Corrigan regarded the hook-and-ladder truck aggrievedly. He had never considered the weight of a truck before, but it struck him that this one had gone to gross excess.

“ One ninety!” Meaghan snorted. “ I s’pose they think I’m runnin’ an ox-cart. Some of yuh’ll have to get out an’ walk pretty soon.”

This was evidently sarcasm. Corrigan smiled at it with uneasiness.

Meaghan demanded: “ What did they send yuh *here* fer? ”

“ I didn’t ask,” Corrigan answered, simply.

The captain eyed him with suspicion. “ Well,” he said, “ yuh carry a good hook, don’t yuh? ”

THE SMOKE - EATERS

Corrigan squinted down his nose, and reddened.

“ A reg’lar tin-cutter,” Meaghan snarled. “ A reg’lar can-opener. I guess that’s why they sent yuh, eh? Thought yuh’d be good at makin’ smoke-vents in a tin roof, eh? ”

Corrigan muttered an unintelligible answer at his feet.

“ Well,” the captain concluded, savagely, “ we’ll soon smoke the shine off it fer yuh.” He turned to his lieutenant. “ Here, Gallagher, show this man his quarters. Yuh’ll go on the bright work . . . d’yuh understand? ”

Corrigan understood that he was to have the care of shining brass of the sliding-poles and the truck. He said, “ I do,” and followed the lieutenant up-stairs with an angry swing of the shoulders that would have meant a fight under other circumstances.

That was his introduction to Captain Meaghan. There followed his meeting

CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION

with the men of the company, a meeting that was a clumsy ceremony of handshakes and embarrassed gutturals. He was shown his cot in the bunk-room and given the key of the closet for his clothes, and then he was left to shift for himself. He proceeded to inspect with due reverence the truck's equipment of ladders, hooks and axes, shovels, picks, wrenches, mauls, bars, jimmies, forks, pipes, hand-lamps, respirators, battering-rams, and what not. He arranged his helmet and his "turnout" coat in the row of them on the bed-ladders. He inquired for and located the cloth and chemical for polishing his "bright work." He studied the list of fire-alarms, patted the horses, and smiled ingratiatingly at the "jigger" over the desk.

It did not reply with an immediate signal, and he went up-stairs again with an undiscouraged grin to wait for it. Within an hour it was known to every member of the company that the new man played a poorer

THE SMOKE - EATERS

game of " checkers " than Billy Parr even, who had a fatal weakness for leading from the double-corner; and that was the beginning of Corrigan's popularity with the " blue-shirts."

Captain Meaghan saw nothing in him except a hulking good nature which might easily be mistaken for the next of kin to stupidity. Corrigan lay awake the greater part of that night, listening in an excess of zeal for a fire-alarm that was not rung in; in the morning, he was heavy-eyed at roll-call, and the captain remarked it. A summons to a small fire that was black when the truck arrived on the scene of it brought Corrigan the last man to his place on the side step; and that was another mark against him. He made a good record when " taps " called the crew to their places at midday, but he closed his eyes while he was at watch on the desk in the afternoon, and the captain accused him of being asleep there. Corrigan did not

CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION

argue; but he did worse. He sulked. And by the time he had turned in for the night, he was discouraged, angry, and plainly marked for the captain's displeasure.

He fell asleep with the small flame of the gas-bracket in the wall above him burning an irritation in his eyes.

The jigger exploded its alarm. The lights swam in his head as he sprang from his bed and struggled into his trousers and high boots, drunk with sleep. He dropped down the pole to the main floor as if falling in a dream, and staggered to catch the side step of the truck as it rolled out into the street in a dull rumble of pounding hoofs and thick voices. A rush of the night air puffed into his face with the wet smell of a draft from a cellar, and began to sing hollow in his ears like the croon in a shell, so that the ride that followed seemed as confused as a nightmare — the three horses straining in their collars,

THE SMOKE - EATERS

the blown lights of the driver's lamps shining on the play of muscles in their sleek flanks, the bell ding-donging monotonously, and the silent men beside him on the step swaying as they finished their dressing, clinging to the side-ladders of the jolting truck. His own hands did not seem to belong to him; they were at a great distance from him, on the ends of long arms. His helmet did not fit his head. He got one arm into his rubber coat, but the other could not find a second sleeve, and he was still fumbling for an arm-hole when the truck swung around a corner and he came on a street of smoke and fire-engines and the hoarse bellowings of battalion chiefs and company foremen.

He looked up from this turmoil to see smoke puffing from the middle windows of a five-story building that seemed immeasurably high in the darkness and the deceptive play of light. His eye was caught by a glare of flames shining on the glasses of a window;

CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION

the panes brightened and burst, clinking on the stone sills; and then a stream of water struck up to overwhelm this sudden brilliance in a cloud of smoke and steam. A rough hand caught the coat from him and swung him around. He heard Lieutenant Gallagher cry out: "You won't need that!" Some one thrust a bar of cold metal into his bewildered clutch and shoved him forward. He came to himself to find that he was stumbling across the cobblestones with a steel tool in his hand.

His head cleared. He drew a long breath.

The men of Company No. 0 were battering at the doors of the building adjoining that which was afire, and he could see that both were wholesale clothing houses, from their signboards. Both, too, were old. He knew that they would be dry and unsafe; and he knew that his crew had been ordered to make smoke-vents in the roof. Then the door fell open, the crew disappeared in the doorway,

THE SMOKE - EATERS

and he followed at full tilt to blunder up the stairs behind a hand-lamp that shone in the darkness ahead of him.

Smoke smarted in his eyes and burned in his nostrils. There was some one behind him hurrying him forward. He took the endless steps three at a bound and raced along the hallways. And what with the excitement, and the pleasure he took in it, his heart-beats seemed to lift him from his feet. He clambered, panting, up the ladder through the scuttle, leaped a dividing parapet between the buildings, and attacked the tin roofing with an eager jab of his tool.

Around him, ax and hook and cutter tore and stripped and splintered tin and rafters and the glass and sash of skylights, till the smoke began to curl upwards out of gaping holes in the roof, and the men pushed back their helmets from their foreheads, and wiped the sweat from their eyes. Captain Meaghan was shouting orders at them from

CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION

the top of the cornice where he stood to watch the work in the street below. They depended on him to warn them of danger from whatever direction they might be menaced, and they worked with as little apparent apprehension for their safety as farm-laborers digging in a field.

At Meaghan's command, a ladder was dragged over the parapet and lowered into the skylight, and Gallegher and three men slid down it. Corrigan stood, listening alertly, with his eye on his captain, as eager as a hound. He heard the windows of the floor beneath crash into the street. A draught of evil-smelling smoke drew up through the vents. "Mighty thick down there," some one behind him said; and without turning, he nodded as if the remark had been addressed to him.

He watched Captain Meaghan lean over the cornice and bawl directions to Gallegher in the lower windows. He heard the answer

THE SMOKE - EATERS

come up thin and faint from below. There were anxious calls and answers across the roof, and he understood that one of Gallagher's men had been lost in the smoke. Meaghan hurried a rescuing party down the ladder, and Corrigan remained to chew at his mustache.

When these men returned with Gallagher's missing fireman and laid him on the roof, three of the crew fanned him with their helmets while Corrigan and the others, at Meaghan's orders, raised the ladder from the skylight and carried it over to the cornice where the captain stood. They lowered it over the front of the building till it hung by its hooks; and Lieutenant Gallagher and the other two men, with red and watering eyes, climbed up it from the windows and hauled it up after them.

The captain turned from conversation with them to order "Long Tom" Donnelly to report that the roof was open and that the

CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION

fire was creeping along the floor below. "Hurry 'em up! Hurry 'em up!" he shouted after him; and Corrigan felt a prickly heat of impatience strike up from the warm roof under his feet.

There was an explosion that shook the building, and he recognized it as the "puff" of the back-draft. "Just missed it," Lieutenant Gallegher said to little Fuchs. Fuchs wiped a wide grin with the back of his hand, and Corrigan smiled in sympathy. The sparks began to swirl up in the smoke from the vents. Captain Meaghan, cursing the engine companies, cried: "Gallegher! Take half the men an' report below. We're doin' no good here."

Corrigan watched the lieutenant with a wistful eye, but Gallegher did not see. He signalled with a wave of the hand to four of the men who stood together near the cornice, and they trailed after him nonchalantly. Corrigan swallowed a lump of

THE SMOKE - EATERS

disappointment in his throat and shifted on his feet.

They stood leaning on their tools, while the smoke reddened with the growth of the flames beneath it; and to Corrigan it seemed as slow to watch as the sunrise that had used to end his night of duty on the platform of his trolley-car. It was an interminable interval of inaction; he patted his heel on the tin as if on the ringer of a gong. "Hell!" Meaghan cried. Corrigan growled in unconscious echo of him: "Hell!" Meaghan wheeled on him. And then, at last, there was the sound of voices from the neighboring roof, and they looked to see a pipeman lifting the nozzle of an empty hose from the scuttle there. Corrigan ran with the others to help, and they drew the hose from the trap in the roof till it stretched like an angleworm, plucked from a clod. There was a shout of orders given and repeated, a breathless pause, and then the

CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION

line swelled with the rush of water and spat its stream into the raw wound of tin and wood.

Corrigan shook the spray from his eyes and ran laughing to "lighten up" the heavy line, pulling and lifting the pulsing body of the hose from the scuttle, and carrying it across the roof as gently as if he were afraid a rough hand would break it. And when he reached the skylight where the fire had showed, he found the smoke black, the top of a ladder pointing up from it, and the last of the pipemen disappearing in the cloud. Following the best traditions of the department, they had gone to fight the fire "from the inside."

Captain Meaghan cried: "Well, boys, there's nuthin' more to do here, but the washin' down. Better get below again."

Corrigan looked up to the sudden realization that the fun was over. It had only just begun, and already it was over for him. He

THE SMOKE - EATERS

blinked up at the clear moonlit sky that showed through the drift of smoke, filling his burning eyes with the cooling light. The men were carrying their tools and ladders across the roof to take them below. He turned to follow them reluctantly.

But the pounding on the roof, the shock of the back-draft, and the running to and fro of the heavy crew had had an effect on the old timbers that had not been reckoned with. A beam cracked like the report of a pistol. The captain turned with an oath of alarm. Corrigan, looking back over his shoulder, saw the great water-tank, that had been supported across the lower angle of the parapet, fall in the tremor of a crackling earthquake that sunk the weakened roof under his feet like the deck of a rolling ship. He sprang for the parapet and leaped upon it as his footing gave way beneath him; the rush of water hissed above the snapping of the timbers; he heard the men cry out in horror;

CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION

and he turned to find a dead silence broken by a low groan from the wreckage hidden in the smoke.

The three pipemen, who had gone down the skylight ladder, were imprisoned there. All the truckmen had escaped.

There was no confusion. Captain Meaghan called out his orders quickly and coolly — to one to report to the chief, to another to lead up another line of hose, to a third to bring the life-lines from the truck, to a fourth to warn the men below that the whole weight of the roof rested now on a floor that was already burning. But Corrigan did not wait for any orders; he had turned with the instinct of the undrilled to make an individual effort to save the men who would be slowly roasted between burning floor and burning roof. Snatching an ax from the nearest hand, he ran along the parapet to the cornice, and began to creep down the incline of the tin roofing into the smoke.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

He heard the captain shout, " Back there, *you!* Three's enough; " and then the smoke blew over him in a wave that blinded him, and choked him, and seemed even to fill his ears so that he heard nothing more. The tin sheathing grew hot under his hands. His throat seemed to contract convulsively so that he could not breathe. He crawled forward desperately, and the slope steepened, and he pitched headlong, sliding on his stomach.

A groan sounded in the pit ahead of him. He turned to get feet foremost, thrust himself forward and slid down on heels and elbows, clinging to his ax. He dropped over a rough edge of tin that cut his hands. His feet struck something soft among the timbers; and he knew, from the moan that answered, that he had found one of the men.

What followed was never clear afterward in his memory. He was like a drowning man held below water in an entanglement of

CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION

wreckage, gasping, suffocating, and fighting in the darkness to get himself free. He found that the pipeman lay unconscious with a leg caught under a beam; and when he struggled to raise the beam the man made a dry clucking in his mouth like a child in a fever. Corrigan got his great hands under the joist and strained in vain to raise the broken end of it, till the cords in his back pained at their roots. Then he fell on it furiously with his ax, his head swimming; and the blows cut into the timber with a sound that grew fainter and fainter to him, so that they seemed like the strokes of a lumberman's ax in the woods at a distance. He was growing sick and weak with the heat. The ax became so heavy that he could hardly lift it. His knees began to loosen, and then there was the roar of a whirlpool in his head, and he sank on his face and fainted.

Meanwhile, Captain Meaghan, on the

THE SMOKE - EATERS

parapet of the adjoining roof, alternately cursed Corrigan, the unfortunate pipemen, the roof, the fire, and his own keen eyes that had failed to note the insecurity of the water-tank. He stamped on the ledge like a sailor on his deck, and the language he used was from the deep seas. He had given his orders. There was nothing to do now but to wait. And it was a thing which Meaghan had never learned to do.

When Gallegher returned with the life-lines, the captain flung himself on the lieutenant, and snatched the lines from him. He tied one quickly under his arms, attached the other to his wrist, and ordered the men to lower him to Corrigan. They braced themselves for his weight. He threw a leg over the parapet. "Hurry up there," he shouted to the pipemen appearing with the hose. "Hurry up there! Train her on the blaze in the middle. All right. Lower away."

CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION

A shower of water from above revived Corrigan in the smoking débris. His helmet had fallen off, and the cool stream poured on his head. He struggled to his feet, hating the smoke and the heat with the personal hatred of a soldier for the enemy who has wounded him. He fell on the obstinate joist with empty hands. "Yuh wud, wud yuh?" he kept muttering. "Yuh wud, wud yuh?" — fighting with the beam in his madness until his hands were numb with bruises. And then he straightened up and threw himself at it in a frenzy, and his huge bulk came down like a sack of sand on the end of it, and finished the work his ax had begun.

The rest was a delirium — years of a delirium — in which he finally got the pipe-man free and passed him to Captain Meaghan, who appeared through the smoke from nowhere, and tied a rope around him and stood him up despite his protests. The roof fell from his feet, and he seemed to soar

THE SMOKE - EATERS

up miles, struggling. He thought he had been tied to a balloon, and he was talking foolishness when the men lifted him over the parapet and laid him on the roof.

He was saved, and he had saved the only pipeman who escaped; the floor had fallen with the others just as aid had come. But he knew nothing of all that until the following day when he found himself lying on his back between the cool sheets of an hospital cot, and passed his bandaged hands over the bandages on his face. He heard Lieutenant Gallegher say: "He's all right. A bit singed, I guess. How are his eyes?"

A strange voice answered: "We'll know to-morrow."

Corrigan said, weakly: "They're all right. I can see down here," and laid his hand on the side of his nose where there was a glimmer of light below the dressings.

The lieutenant laughed. "Couldn't bandage over that nose. Be quiet now. We

CORRIGAN'S PROMOTION

want you back to the house as soon's you get on your feet. The chief's promoted you."

Corrigan tried to understand what he meant, but the pain in his head prevented him. He asked: "Whur'd yuh get the balloon?"

They called him "Balloon" at the house when he reported for duty two weeks later, but he had been entered on the Roll of Merit, and his pay had been increased, and his name was large in the land.

Captain Meaghan scowled at him, in a fierce congratulation. "Yuh should 've waited fer orders, Corrigan," he said, gruffly.

"Yes, sir," he apologized. "I didn't know."

"No harm done," Meaghan said. "Yuh'll be on the ladder committee. There's another man on the bright work."

VII

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

I

THE crew had finished their "committee work"—had groomed the horses, swept the main floor, brightened harness, brass, and steel-work, and washed, oiled, and polished the big truck till it shone like a gigantic toy. Sergeant Pim was in the sitting-room above stairs, with three of the company, stretching his legs under a game of poker; and when he was not growling at a luck which duplicated his "discard" always in his "draw," he was calling out sarcasms at young Waters for the dust he was raising in sweeping the sitting-room floor. As the Merry Andrew of the company, Pim alter-

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

nated between fits of clownishness in which he sacrificed all dignity for laughter, and fits of a sour wit in which he endeavored to regain what he had lost, by punishing familiarity as insolence and flaying an innocent victim as a peace-offering to his self-respect. Waters had been such a victim of such a mood, but as the freshman of the crew he had been silent under the hazing. He had endured it for two days; and even now, as long as Pim contented himself with such remarks as "Sally, y' ought 've been a white wings. Your style o' sweepin' ain't indoor sweepin'. It's Broadway 'n a forty-mile breeze," Waters continued to work without more than frowning at the laughter of the men. But when Pim lost on a call to show cards, spat contemptuously, and called out: "'Waters!' What a name to squirt on a fire!" the recruit wheeled on him, and retorted hoarsely, "What's the matter with Pim fer a name?"

THE SMOKE - EATERS

Pim did not look up from his dealing of the cards. “ ‘ Pim? ’ ” he repeated, cheerfully.

“ Well, there’s just one er two things the matter with ‘ Pim,’ Sally. Pim’s no name fer corner-saloon politics.” And this was a reference to “ Dry Dime ” Dolan, an uncle of Waters, and a ward politician whose influence, according to the gossip of the truck-house, had pushed Waters into the department.

Waters leaned on his broom and knit his level eyebrows in a glare at Pim. The sergeant regarded his hand of cards. The men about him were in a broad grin.

“ Firemen ’re like the aristocracy fer ancestors these days,” Pim said. “ On’y it ain’t a grandfather, it’s an uncle — ”

Waters broke at him with an oath. “ Yuh — old barnacle! ” he cried. “ Y’ought t’ve been scraped out o’ here long ago. Yuh’re too — ignorant to get a promotion

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

yourself, an' because *you* can't get along, yuh're sore on any one else that does."

Pim replied: "It's slow climbin' when the ladder's full an' the probationers 're goin' up the back stairs."

Waters threw down his broom and struck the table with his clenched fist. "By G——!" he screamed, in a young man's cracked voice of wrath, "I'll go up yer ladder over yer shoulders! Wait! An' I'll put my heel between yer teeth when I get up, y' ol' back-number, yuh spavined ol' cripple, yuh."

Pim smiled. "Well, well," he said. "Will yuh, now? Whiskey's a power in the land, sure enough. They say some Third Avenue brands 'll put out a fire."

The saloon of "Dry Dime" Dolan was on Third Avenue, but Waters did not answer. He stood with the echo of his own high voice in his ears, staring at the face of a fireman in whose shamed and pitying

THE SMOKE - EATERS

smile he read that he had made himself ridiculous. He turned with a growl of profanity, kicked his broom into a corner, and went below stairs, his mouth set in an ugly snarl of anger.

The other men at the table had learned the wisdom of the truck-house maxim: "Never butt into an argument until it's a fight;" and they had sat through the quarrel without a word. Even now, only Billy Parr dared to remonstrate with Pim.

"What's the matter, Jim?" he asked, mildly. "What 've yuh got against the youngster?"

"Me?" Pim said. "Got against him? Why, bless my eyes, I got nuthin' against him. I knew his dad in the days when we were six-year-olds an' 'ust to help the ol' goose-necks paint the fires green down the Bowery. He's all right if he's got any of his ol' man in him. But he's got to learn that he ain't any better fer bein' a grafter,

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

neither. An' he's got to learn it before he'll be any good in this crew, at that. . . . You leave Sally an' me alone. We're conductin' a selec' school of instruction fer one."

Parr, however, did not leave Waters and him alone. He remonstrated with Waters privately. "What's eatin' yuh, anyway?" he said. "Pim don't mean any harm. It's just his way."

"Is it?" Waters replied. "Well, he'll learn a new way before I'm done with him. I'll make him eat dirt fer poundin' me the way he's been doin'." He walked away with his chin up.

Parr went back to Pim. "Look here, now, Jim," he said. "You leave Waters alone. You take my advice an' leave Waters alone."

Pim laughed. "What's the matter, now?"

Parr answered, solemnly: "That's all

THE SMOKE - EATERS

right. I'm givin' yuh a straight tip. You leave Waters alone."

"Well, say," Pim protested, "what's the use o' you comin' round here with a holler like this? It ain't me that's worryin' Waters. He's been goin' round here talkin' politics like a cart-tail spellbinder, until— It ain't my fault if he's an unlicked cub, is it? 'Taint my fault?"

"Look here, now, Jim," Parr said, confidentially, "Waters's got a pull. There's no sense puttin' yerself up against it this way. Leave 'm alone."

Pim reached out an emphatic fist and wagged his thumb, with a double-jointed jerkiness, under Parr's nose. "Look here, now, Billy," he mocked him, "when I play spaniel, an' wag my tail *so*, ev'ry time I see a grafter, whistle to me an' I'll come." He turned on his heel with that, and went down-stairs to his stretch of desk duty.

His bad mood persisted. Sitting there,

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

beneath the jigger, he tattooed thoughtfully on the blotter and chewed his cud of bitterness. He had come to the department, twenty years before, because he needed a regular salary to support his wife. In his third year he had distinguished himself at a fire by saving the lives of two women. He had hoped for an immediate recognition of his services, but he had been approached by the henchman of a ward politician with an itching palm. He had refused to "grease the wheels;" and the result had been that he had been placed on the Roll of Merit for saving life "without personal risk." There the recognition had ended. He had been marked as a man not in favor with the powers, and he had climbed up the grades from \$800 a year to \$1,400 slowly and obscurely.

Now, he was still a blue-shirt, a sergeant by courtesy of the department's rules, but with no outlook. The tide of promotion had

THE SMOKE - EATERS

swept by and left him stranded. He was old enough to be a battalion chief, but too old to become a lieutenant. Add to all this that he had not the text-book learning necessary to pass a civil service examination, even if he were recommended for promotion; that ambition was dead in him.

Waters had called him a "barnacle." Well, Waters, he told himself, was probably right.

He had but one consolation; he had been independent. He had paid no blackmail to the ring; he had never cringed to his superiors; and though he had played the fool among the men, it was because he was vain of his natural wit and his pride lived on laughter.

He wrote again and again on a blank sheet of paper, "J. Pim" — with the "J" superimposed on the "P" to make "Jim Pim" — and he looked at himself in that name and saw himself a failure, an odd character, of

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

a comic fame in his company, but beyond all hope of promotion. "Jim Pim—"

A man in an apron, running in from the street, caught at his waist on the chain that hung across the doorway, and cried: "There's a fire! Say! There's a big fire down the street!" waving his hand wildly toward the water-front.

Men came running out from behind the apparatus. Pim put his head out the door and saw a light smoke far down at the foot of the street. The man shouted in his ear, "That's it!" Pim thrust him back from the doorway, slipped the catch on the chain, and turned to sound a still alarm on the electric button below the gong.

The three horses burst from their stalls with hoofs thudding on the planks. Before they had reached their places, Waters and the firemen from the sitting-room had "hit the floor." By the time Pim and Gallegher had backed the horses into position, the

THE SMOKE - EATERS

driver, in his seat, had released the harness with a jerk on the reins. Captain Meaghan cried from the sidewalk, "All right!"—the horses strained against their collars—and Pim caught the step of the truck as the wheels scraped past his toes.

When he got his helmet on his head, he glanced at Waters, who was on the other side of the truck, and saw him excitedly fighting his way into his turn-out coat. Pim smiled. "I've put a bat in his belfry," he thought.

When they drew near the fire, he recognized the burning building as one of the few tenements left in that district between the water-front street of sailors' boarding-houses and the warehouses that had crowded them out. He saw also that the alarm had come in late, for the smoke was now pouring out of all the windows of the third floor, and the occupants of the upper stories were throwing pans, bedding, and furniture into the street. A crowd had gathered at a safe

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

distance to laugh and enjoy the excitement. Lieutenant Gallegher turned to Pim. "Send in an alarm," he ordered, and Pim dropped from the step at a street corner to run for a fire-box a block away.

He doubled back on a steady lope with a policeman lumbering along behind him. The arrival of the company had drawn a crowd that blocked the street. He shouldered his way through them, caught up an ax from the truck, and darted into the doorway of the burning house. He met the crew pouring down from the upper landing. "Whole floor's afire," the first man told him.

He turned back with them. The police had cleared the sidewalk. The rain of bedding from above had ceased. The women who had been throwing it out had found that the fire had cut them off from the stairs, and they leaned out the windows, screaming and weeping hysterically. One fat Ital-

THE SMOKE - EATERS

ian matron had straddled the sill; she kicked at the wall with a shoeless foot as if she were going to jump. Captain Meaghan roared at her: "D—— you! You jump down here an' I'll have yuh put in the lock-up!" She gaped, silenced. He cried to the squad of men with whom Waters was standing: "Get up there with yer ladders." He called to his lieutenant: "Gallegher, open up the roof. Take ropes with yuh."

Gallegher snapped his fingers at Pim, Parr, and two of the other men. They buckled on their life-belts, picked out a coil of line and a light ladder, took axes, hooks, and crowbars, and disappeared in the door of the adjoining house just as Waters caught the hook of his scaling-ladder on the sill of the first-story window and went up the pole of it nimbly.

Captain Meaghan said, "Steady, there."

Waters straddled the sill of the first win-

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

dow, with his left leg in the room, turned the hook of the ladder out from him, raised the forty-pounder with a sure arm—his hands far apart, his left hand uppermost to steady the weight—and put the hook in the second story window with the precision of a timed drill. The hook of the ladder below him touched his toes as he stood up.

"Good enough," Captain Meaghan said.
"Good enough. . . . Steady there!"

Waters had the top of his ladder in the smoke of the third-story window before the man who was following him had fairly gripped his sill with his knees. "Shake yerself there," Meaghan called to the latter. "Don't let yer leader get away from yuh like that. . . . Who is that first man?" he asked the remainder of the squad.

"Waters," they said.

Waters was sitting in the belch from the third story window. He called down some-

THE SMOKE - EATERS

thing unintelligible. "Go up, go up!" Meaghan ordered.

Waters went up. The head of his ladder rose steadily along the red-brick wall until the fat Italian woman caught it at arm's length. She shook it and yelled. Meaghan bellowed: "Hi, you! Drop that!" She attempted to put her foot on it, and in doing so she released her hold. Waters wrenched the ladder free, jabbed it up with both hands and struck her with the hook with such force that she fell back into the room. Before she could get righted, he was in the window. She attempted to throw her arms about him; he held her back with a hand at her throat; and she fought like a drowning woman.

Captain Meaghan, stamping in the gutter, bawled: "Good enough! Good enough! Get her down, now, boys. All up there! All up!"

The chain of ladders was completed from

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

the ground to Waters, and the men clambered up to their stations. Waters caught the frantic woman about the waist, and despite the strangle-hold she took of his neck, despite her screams and her kickings, and despite her two hundred pounds, he got her down to the man below him with the loss only of his helmet, which she knocked off when he closed with her. She was passed down from man to man, struggling more and more feebly as she descended, flapping in her voluminous and fluttering skirts. She collapsed, breathless, on the sidewalk. Waters went back for the next woman, who came quietly.

The smoke was thickening from the third story window, so that the man below Waters had to go down beneath it and take his station there. As the last woman was passed down, her dress caught fire in a spurt of flame, and the firemen beat it out with their hands. Waters went back to the fourth story window. He climbed in through it.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

A fire-engine came blowing shrilly down the street, with its tender turning the corner behind it. "They were slow enough," Captain Meaghan growled.

He was watching the edge of the roof for Gallegher. "Get yer thirty-five-foot ladders up," he ordered his squad, and they began to get out the heavy ladders to carry the lines of hose.

He watched the roof for Gallegher's squad. He heard the blows of axes on a scuttle and the crash of glass in a skylight. Then Pim appeared on the cornice with a line in his hand, and looked down at the flame below him. A puff of smoke burst from the fourth story window through which Waters had entered. Captain Meaghan waved to Pim to get his line over the cornice. "There's a man in there," he shouted. "Waters!"

Pim ran back to tie his rope.

Gallegher and the others of the squad, who had been making smoke-vents in the roof,

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

had found that the fire was fierce in the rear of the building, where both the third and fourth stories were ablaze. When they got the scuttle off, the smoke rose in a great "whoof." It was impossible to descend into it. They turned at Pim's shout from the cornice and ran to help him loop the life-line to a chimney.

"Waters 's in down there," he said. "He's cut off. We'll have to haul him up. Darn fool!"

He took several turns of the rope around the shaft of the snap-hook on his life-belt, dropped over the cornice with the slack of the rope drawn over his thigh, and slid down deftly to the window. "I put a bat in his belfry all right, all right," he was muttering. He lifted Waters's scaling-ladder from the sill and raised it to catch on the cornice. Then, having released himself from the rope, he groped his way into the hot smoke of the room and stumbled against a table. He

THE SMOKE - EATERS

edged around it and kicked a rocking-chair. He dropped to his hands and knees and crept forward with his face to the floor to catch whatever air there might be along the oil-cloth. He heard a groan. He lay flat and listened. It was repeated ahead of him, to the right. He scuttled across quickly in that direction and bumped his helmet against a closed door—the hall door as he guessed from the location of the stairway. He rattled the knob. The door was locked with a latch lock. But the latch was on his side. He pulled it open and fell back from a burst of flame.

There was some one lying on the floor against the balustrade of the stairway. He turned the leaf of his helmet over his face, darted into the heat—and heard the forgotten door click shut behind him.

He understood, then, how Waters had been trapped; there was a spring hinge on the door. It was locked. He kicked furiously

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

at the panels, holding his breath against a heat that seared his eyes and cracked his lips — that dried his body till it seemed his skin was a suit of itching wool on him — that set the blood beating in his head as if his skull would burst. He kicked frantically at the door, turned his back on it and pounded at it with his heel. His lungs were fighting with him for a breath of the deadly heat, and his head was reeling and his knees were weak. He knotted his muscles in one last gathering of his last strength, and, with a despairing kick, put his heel through the panel. He kicked it out clean with a weaker blow, fell forward on Waters, dragged him across the boards, put the private's bare head through the opening, and lay down himself with his head on his arms, at the mercy of the flames.

Parr and Gallegher found them there unconscious, and took them out to the roof. They were carried down through the adjoin-

THE SMOKE - EATERS

ing house, burned and blackened, but still alive. They were taken to the emergency ward of an hospital in the one ambulance; their burns were dressed together; and they were put to bed in two cots side by side.

It was there that Pim dismissed the class in his select school of instruction two weeks later, when Waters was leaving the hospital, cured, and the sergeant still lay, swathed like a mummy, in his cot. Waters had been trying to thank him without quite forgiving him for his truck-house persecution. Pim had put aside this clumsy show of gratitude with a pathetic half-smile that trembled between the burned bristle of his upper lip and the medicated cotton that covered his chin. "I guess we gave you a bad two days down at the house," he said, in an old man's voice, thin and weak with illness. "No harm done, eh? None meant. . . . Well, good luck, Waters. Can't shake hands. They've got

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

me in ten-ounce gloves." He spread his bandaged hands on the coverlet.

Waters would not accept this dismissal. He said, reddening: "I hope yuh'll be back at the house."

Pim rolled his head on the pillow. "No," he said, slowly. "I'm out. I'm down an' out. . . . They've got me on my back. That's right. They've got me down." It was the sum of two weeks of bitter reflection — two weeks of looking back on a life of disappointed hopes and lost ambitions. "Waters," he said, "*you've* got a pull. Use it — use it fer all it's worth. Yuh'll have to crawl to a lot o' dubs, but yuh have to do that in any business. It's the way to get on. I tried the other way, an' they get the laugh on yuh all right."

Waters said: "What yuh call a grafter? Yuh roasted me good an' hot on that. And it wasn't true, neither. I didn't graft."

"I was a fool," Pim said. "I always was!

THE SMOKE - EATERS

If I had my life to live over — Well, I guess I'd do the same thing again. That's me. That's Jim Pim. But if yuh want the las' word on Jim Pim, he's been a fool. Young an' old, he's been a fool."

"Oh, I guess not," Waters said, half-heartedly. Pim shook his head, but did not reply. Waters felt himself incapable of further consolation. He shifted his weight from foot to foot. He fumbled with his hat. "Well, good-by," he said, huskily.

Pim licked his dry lips. "Good-by, Waters," he whispered. "Take care o' yerself."

II

Waters returned to duty on the last Friday in March. It was on the following Sunday that the Hansard Building was burned. Early in the afternoon a hurricane — predicted by the Weather Bureau — whirled up from the far southwest and struck the city

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

with the back sweep of a northeast gale that drove the rain in sheets before it, scooped it up from the gutters, tossed it in waves against the houses, and carried it breast-high along the streets, cold, solid, and stinging, like small shot. At nightfall this rain ceased; and the wind, free of the weight of water, leaped forward to the velocity of a tornado.

It was ten o'clock when a policeman on Broadway, sheltering himself in a doorway from the storm, saw the light of flames dancing in the basement windows of a wholesale clothing house that stood on the street corner across the road; and he turned in an immediate alarm. Before the first engine companies could arrive, the sidewalk gratings were so many gridirons over a leaping fire. By the time the second alarm was answered, the whole ground floor was ablaze, and the heat had driven the pipemen back from the doors. With the third alarm the flames

THE SMOKE - EATERS

burst from the roof in a stream of sparks that rose from the bellows-draft of that gigantic forge, and danced in the wind up the north wall of the adjoining Hansard Building to the full height of its sixteen stories.

Engines were ordered to connect with the standpipes of that building; engine companies were rushed up the elevators with their hose, to fight the fire from the windows; truck companies were sent up with extra lines to assist them; and Company No. 0 followed last with orders to wet down the north wall from the roof. "There's a fool job," Captain Meaghan muttered.

Corrigan and Waters reached the roof with the nozzle of a line of hose that was being laid from the standpipe of the top floor; and they came out into the night dragging their length of line, to face a gale of wind that took the breath from between their teeth. They struggled against it, through

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

the darkness, toward the light of fire over the parapet; and they looked down there, through the smoke, at the flames in the roof of the clothing house twelve stories below them.

Captain Meaghan, behind them, cried back to the other men: "Start yer water!" and in a moment a feeble stream swelled the line of hose and gushed from the pipe. He cursed it. "It can't spit past its chin," he shouted in a passionate disgust that lifted his voice above the storm.

The stream strengthened as they watched it. "Keep wettin' her down," he shouted in Corrigan's ear. "Get up another line," he cried to the rest of the crew. The rushing of the wind drowned their answer, but they hurried below to obey him.

He remained with Corrigan and Waters, watching the fire spread and brighten in the roof of the clothing house; and Corrigan was still grinning at his "Can't spit past its

THE SMOKE - EATERS

chin." They were two hundred feet above the street level, and the storm, hurling itself across the huddled roofs below them, drew up a draft of heat and smoke to them as if they were looking down a chimney. They could guess what the heat must be in the street, for across the road the woodwork of the windows of a five story building had caught fire without the touch of any flame, and a crew of pigmies were drenching it with a stream which they shot up straight from the sidewalk.

Officers the size of manikins ran up and down in the ruddy glow, waving their little arms. The fire flowed over the roof as if it were a burning oil; and the smoke came up to them thicker, and the heat more stifling, with every breath.

Their weak stream dribbled down the wall, to dry out on the hot bricks before it touched the point of danger; and Corrigan leaned over the parapet to see that the paint was

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

beginning to peel off in great scales far below. Waters and he tried hopelessly to reach these, by swinging the pipe from side to side. They might as well have tried to irrigate a desert with it. Their eyes were dry and beginning to smart.

The rest of the crew came up again, dragging a second line. "No use bringin' more lines up here," Captain Meaghan shouted to Gallegher. "Windows 'll be breakin'. There ain't a shutter on the whole blamed buildin'. Fireproof! She's matchwood! Back down to the twelfth floor. Get lines stretched to the air-shaft there."

The men went back with their hose.

"Do the best yuh can up here," he advised Corrigan. "Chief's orders to wet her down. Keep yer eye open fer that air-shaft."

Corrigan caught the first of these instructions, but the wind carried away that last warning of danger, and the captain turned

THE SMOKE - EATERS

and left the two men unconscious of the catastrophe that was preparing for them.

The air-shaft, in fact, was acting as a sheltered flue for the flames. It cut a deep groove in the wall of the Hansard Building at Corrigan's left; and the wind, rushing into it, rose straight aloft, blowing up sparks like the cupola of a blast furnace. Corrigan, watching only the wall and windows below him, pitied the crews at work in the street. He was wishing for a quid of chewing tobacco, and he remembered with exasperation that Waters would have none.

That was one of Waters's social limitations — he did not chew. It was also one of the reasons why Corrigan disliked him. They had been fellow probationers at Fire Headquarters; and the instructor, having pitted them against each other in a race with scaling-ladders, had publicly compared Corrigan to a baby hippopotamus in point of nimbleness, because Waters had run away

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

from him. After they had joined Company No. 0, Corrigan had found Waters's conversation all "hot air an' free silver," and had quarrelled with him about this wearisome enthusiasm for politics. Consequently there was no friendship between them; and they continued stolidly at work, now, in the silence of mutual indifference.

The growing strength of the stream threatened to tear the nozzle from their hands, and they raised the hose to their shoulders to bend it in a swan's neck arch that sent the water hissing down the bricks. They were busied so, when they saw a bluish-green flame flash in the red of the fire in the roof below, and a belch of smoke rolled up to them on the echo of an explosion. Before it reached them, they heard another roar beneath it; the cloud of smoke was split with flame, and they jumped back from the parapet as if from the crater of a volcano, and threw themselves on their faces, as the

THE SMOKE - EATERS

burning gases, freed by the collapse of the roof, — flaring two hundred feet in the air and licking up the side of the Hansard Building, to break every window-glass in its upper ten stories and ignite every window-curtain, window-sash and “trim” in its north wall, — rolled over them in a heat that nipped their ears like a frost-bite and was gone.

Corrigan pinned down the pipe that was threshing about on the roof, and staggered back to the parapet with it. The beat of heat was unendurable, and he could see nothing for the smoke that blinded him with tears. He did not know that the gale was carrying a solid tongue of fire into the hidden air-shaft, and that every window on that shaft was already spitting flames. He could just see that the woodwork of the window below him was afire, and he called Waters to train the pipe on it with him. They doused it black at once, and scattered the smoke to see an-

TRAINING " SALLY " WATERS

other blaze below. Then the stream from their hose weakened and fell short; and it was plain that the crews were using the water on the lower floors.

" We're wanted down below, I guess," Waters said. " We're no good up here now."

Corrigan nodded. They shut off the nozzle and turned to drag the line to the door of the stairs.

They were too late. Corrigan saw the blaze in the air-shaft, and cried out an oath. That shaft, he knew, lit the stairway from the ground up, and cut them off from the elevator shaft in the center of the building. They dropped the line and ran to the door. Smoke was pouring from it; and flame was behind the smoke.

Corrigan ran back for the hose, and with the water to open the way for him, fought down three steps into a blaze that could not be faced. The wind, blowing in the

THE SMOKE - EATERS

broken windows of the air-shaft, brought up a smother of heat and smoke against which his pipe was useless. He was fighting a prairie fire with the stream of an extinguisher.

Waters pitched forward on his shoulders. Corrigan braced himself against the weight, turned to catch Waters under the armpits, and carried him up, himself half-suffocated, and laid him on the roof. They were greeted by the fierce purring of the flames. Waters groaned.

“ Y’ all right? ” Corrigan asked him.

He rolled his eyes. “ Let’s get down out o’ here,” he gasped.

Corrigan straightened up and looked around him; the doorway was the only entrance to the roof. He walked back to kick the useless hose down the staircase so that he might shut the tin-sheathed door on the blaze below. He went to the stone railing that surmounted the cornice on the front of

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

the building; the coping overhung the windows in a sheer drop to the street. He hurried to the south wall; the windows there were twelve feet down, and there was no pipe, no foothold. He went to the back of the roof and found another coping.

He turned and watched Waters running from parapet to parapet, now hidden in a cloud of whirling smoke, now black in the red glow of wind-blown flames. He saw him lean over the marble railing of the front cornice, and put his hands in a trumpet to his mouth. He saw him take off his helmet and try to throw it down into the street; and the gale snatched it from his hand, tossed it aloft, and blew it away to the south with the smoke and the flying embers.

He came running back to Corrigan. "Let's get down," he panted. "Let's get down."

Corrigan did not reply.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“ For the Lord’s sake, Corrigan,” he cried, “ don’t let’s burn alive up here.”

Corrigan shook his head. “ I can’t get down,” he said.

He could see that there was nothing on the roof to burn; the heat and not the flame would be their danger. The fire was at its worst in the light-well. At the point farthest from it, there was a huge water-tank, protected with a covering of tin and supported across the angle of the walls on steel beams. Even if the roof should fall, the tank would not go with it. They would have water to prevent the heat from baking them to death. They would have the tank to shelter them from the drift of smoke.

Corrigan went over to it and crouched down to peer under the beams. Waters stumbled against him. “ Say,” he whimpered, “ I can’t — I can’t get down.”

Corrigan pushed him aside impatiently. “ Well, who said yuh cud?” he snarled.

TRAINING " SALLY " WATERS

" Yuh're up here to stay. Yuh better make up yer mind to that, an' shut yer yap."

Waters threw up his arms and screamed at the sky in a high, dry voice, clutching with his fingers and snapping like a dog with his teeth. Then he pitched forward into the smoke on a run for the street parapet again.

Corrigan climbed slowly up the iron ladder to the top of the tank. He came on a scuttle there and raised it, to find that the tank was almost full. He took off his rubber coat and dipped it down, and it came up dripping. He rubbed it over his face, and licked at the moisture on the smooth tarpaulin; and the touch of water sent a burning fever-flush of thirst through him. He reached down with his helmet, drew it up half-full, and emptied it over his head and down his back, again and again. Then he drank in great gulps, sighing with satisfaction.

The relief brought back his energies. The tank ladder took his eye, and it occurred to

THE SMOKE - EATERS

him that if he could get it loose he might be able to reach a lower window with it. He took hold of it in his great hands, drew a long breath, and strained to wrench it from its iron sockets, tightening on it slowly until the blood drummed in his ears. He bent the upright of it, but the socket still held it. When he paused for breath, he remembered Waters and shouted to him for aid.

He got no answer, and he descended to the roof to find Waters lying in the worst of the heat that blew from the air-shaft. He dragged him back from it and emptied a helmet full of water on his face.

Waters rolled his head from side to side, muttering to himself.

“ Look here,” Corrigan said. “ Look-a-here — ”

Waters opened staring eyes, moving his lips in a whisper.

“ Better get up to the tank an’ take a

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

dip. I want yuh to help get that ladder loose."

Waters slipped an arm about Corrigan's neck, raising himself on his elbow. "Get me down out o' this," he whispered. "Get me down out o' this, an' I'll make it good. I got a pull. I got a promise — "

Corrigan threw off the arm. "Stop talkin' foolish. I can't get yuh down. Here, take a drink."

Waters caught at his collar, knocking aside the water. "Get me down," he said, huskily. "You get me down, Corrigan. I'll make it good. I'm right in with the gang. Dorgan said — "

Corrigan threw him off with a curse. "I can't get yuh down," he yelled at him. "What the ——'s the matter with yuh, yuh —— — — "

Waters fell back and lay breathing hard, with open mouth. A puff of smoke blew down and choked him with a sob.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

Corrigan dragged him across the roof to the tank, and sat down beside him — uncertain what to do — with his back to the parapet and his face to the light-well. The heat swam over them in a suffocating current. Waters threw out his arms and lay as if stretched on a cross, rolling his head from side to side, agonized and speechless.

He began to mumble the “confession” of a Roman Catholic, beating his breast with a whispered “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.”

Corrigan scowled. The smoke irritated him; the heat pricked him.

“Can’t yuh shut yer yap fer half a minute?” he complained.

Waters groaned. He asked, in a hoarse whisper: “D’yuh think there’s any hell?”

Corrigan laughed. “Aw, cut it out,” he said. “Yuh’re scared. That’s all that’s wrong with *you*.”

There was a crash of breaking windows

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

in the air-shaft. The flames roared up, flapping like a banner in the wind.

"Help!" Waters screeched. "Help! Hel—"

Corrigan clapped a hand over his mouth, and silenced him. "Well—*you—lobster!*"

"Aw, don't," he pleaded. "Don't!"

Corrigan stood up in the thickening smoke and looked down at him. "Look-a-here," he said. "If you got any wind to spare, yuh 'd better save it fer yer prayers. This roof 's goin' to drop yuh in a hole so hot it won't leave enough of yuh fer hell to raise a blister on. Shut up, will yuh?"

He turned away from him angrily, and climbed the ladder to the top of the tank, so that he might sit down there in quiet. He could hear the engines in the street whistling frantically for coal from the fuel wagons; and they sounded very far away. He reached down into the scuttle and drank from his helmet again. The air came up cool

THE SMOKE - EATERS

from the tank. He lay with his face in the draft of it, and shut his dry eyelids on his aching eyes.

Although he had threatened Waters with the collapse of the roof, he had spoken in anger, to terrify him into silence, and not because he believed that either of them would lose his life. He was not a man of imagination, and his breath was too strong in his body for him to realize the possibility of death. If the crew below could not find some means of reaching them, he hoped to live out the fire where he was! Chiefly, he was angry — and bewildered by his own anger — because Waters had gone to pieces and made such a noise. He could not think. The heat was wearing on him. He lay there, waiting.

And in fact the crew below were already planning to reach him. Captain Meaghan had been so busy — trying to keep the flames

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

on the twelfth floor from forcing their way from the air-shaft to the elevator-well — that he did not think of the two men whom he had left on the roof. It was not until sparks and burning embers began to pour down the elevator-well from the upper stories that the possibility of their situation occurred to him.

He called two of his crew to get scaling-ladders, and, leaving Gallegher in charge of the pipes, he ran to the southwest end of the building — to be farthest from the fire — and opening a window there, looked up. He could see no signs of fire showing in any of the windows above him. "Looks all right," he said to the men. "But yuh'll have to be quick. Keep yer eyes open fer the windows below as yuh go up."

They had a coil of life-line and two ladders. They used but one of the latter, going up together for greater speed, one man holding the other on the sill by the snap-hook of

THE SMOKE - EATERS

his life-belt, while he, standing upright on the window-sill, had both his hands free to raise the ladder. This made it necessary to break in the lower sash of each window with their hatchets; and at their first window they saw the wisdom of Meaghan's warning. The room was stifing with heat and smoke; and as soon as they opened a vent into it the fire showed in the darkness.

At the fourteenth story, a light of flames was already glimmering behind the broken pane. The smoke poured out on them as they beat in the glass and hauled up the ladder. They went ahead, however; and while they were climbing up the wall from that window, they heard a cry below them and looked down to see the flames in the thirteenth story cutting them off.

A shout of warning from Captain Meaghan was followed by a faint call from above them. They looked up and saw Corrigan

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

peering over the edge of the water-tank. Meaghan shouted: "Come down the rope!" They looked down to see him waving to them. They looked up, and Corrigan had disappeared.

The upper man said: "We can't reach 'm."

They delayed for a moment—a moment that was almost fatal—for, while they hesitated, the fire burst out in the fourteenth story also. Then they tied the end of their rope around the shaft of the ladder; each took a twist of it in the hook of his belt; they dropped.

They slid down through fire and smoke, blistered and blinded, to Captain Meaghan, who caught each as he came, and drew him in the window. A fireman, sent by Lieutenant Gallegher, came up shouting: "Fire's at the elevator-shaft!" They turned and ran.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

Corrigan had gone down to the roof to get Waters, and found him lying on his face on the bricks.

“ The men’re comin’ up the ladders,” he said.

Waters sprang to his feet with this new hope of life, and followed him around the tank to the parapet. And they looked down on the empty ladder, twenty feet below them, hanging in the flames with a blazing rope dangling from it into the smoke.

“ Hell! ” Corrigan said, disgustedly.

Waters stared at the abandoned apparatus. “ *I* guess,” he said, in a new voice.

He turned back with Corrigan to the front of the tank again. There was a lull in the wind; the smoke and the flames rose up straight on all sides of them, and the bricks were warm under their feet. There was no escape now.

“ We got a half a chanct left,” Corrigan said. “ We can get in the tank.”

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

Waters shook his head. "No use. I got to cash in, I guess."

Corrigan cursed him. "Well, I ain't," he shouted. "Get a hold o' this ladder!"

He braced himself, with a foot against the tin covering of the tank, bent his back, and tugged to loosen the ladder from its fastenings. Waters helped him. They strained and struggled with all the strength of every muscle, and the great screws in the sockets of the uprights came out slowly. Once the ladder had loosened its hold, they levered it, twisted it, and wrenched it free. Corrigan crawled under the steel beams and turned off the stop-cock there. Then they both climbed aloft, lowered the ladder into the tank, and slid down, one on each side of the rungs, into the water. They drank together, sunk to the teeth.

Corrigan ducked. "Yuh'd better tie yer-self on," he spluttered. "We'll be eatin' smoke here before long."

THE SMOKE - EATERS

The scuttle was a red square of light above them, and they could see each other's faces as pale blurs of no recognizable feature in the darkness. They stripped off their upper clothing, and bound themselves under their arms to the ladder.

They could hear the crackle and roar of flames outside. There was a pecking of scattered rain on the tin above them.

"I wish I'd somethin' t'eat," Corrigan said.

Waters sighed. "I'd like somethin' to breathe better."

He was choking with heat and smoke. He rested his chin on a rung of the ladder. He was tired and dizzy. He seemed to be drifting on clouds of smoke, blown about in the storm and heat, a glowing spark above the flames. He heard Corrigan's voice, at a great distance, say, "Wind changed . . . south."

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

The Hansard Building had caught fire at 10.45 o'clock. At midnight, the chief, fearing the effect of heat and water on the steel framework, ordered all the companies to back down to the tenth floor and leave the six upper stories to burn themselves out. They burned all night, the flames lighting the city like a huge torch held aloft above the houses.

It was feared that the floors might fall and bring the roof with them; but the steel columns, girders, and floor beams had all been built around and protected with terra-cotta furring, the walls lined with "wire lath" and plaster, and the floor arches built of hard-burned terra-cotta blocks. There was nothing in the rooms to burn except the office furniture and the woodwork of bases, chair-rails, doors, windows, and floors.

Daybreak found the building still standing, a smoking and blackened shell above the tenth story, with the firemen putting out the

THE SMOKE - EATERS

last smoulder in the gutted rooms. They fought their way up slowly from floor to floor, until by noon Captain Meaghan and a squad of his company, looking for their dead, reached the stairs leading to the roof.

They found there the blackened nozzle which Corrigan had abandoned to the fire. They went up-stairs, hopelessly, and burst open the door, and saw Corrigan himself — red-eyed and dripping, and stripped to the waist — sitting on the edge of the tank, beating with his heels on its sides, and singing crazy nothings in the voice of insanity.

Captain Meaghan went over to him and called up, "Where's Waters?"

He winked and pointed down into the tank. "I'm the king o' the castle," he chanted. "I'm the king o' the castle. I'm the — What? — What's Waters? Little Sally Waters — Oh, he's a spellbinder," he said, with a grin. "He's a spellbinder,

TRAINING "SALLY" WATERS

talkin' hot air. . . . Comin' up? Come on up. It ain't as hot up here as it was."

And they found Waters, unconscious but alive, still tied to the ladder, and floating with his head between the rungs.

Some weeks later, when ex-Sergeant Pim (retired on half-pay on account of his injuries) was making a social call on his old friends in the truck-house, he thought to ask for Waters. "Him?" Gallegher said. "Oh, he's quit the department. He's going to join the police."

VIII

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

WHEN the alarm of fire in Cook & Co's warehouse rang in the truck-house at ten o'clock at night, Captain Meaghan and Battalion Chief Tighe were closeted together in the captain's room. "No," Tighe had been repeating patiently, "there ain't any knockin' in it. There ain't any politics in it. There ain't anything in it but just what I'm tellin' yuh. The chief says he wants young blood in the department. He's squeezed out all the old fellers out of the ranks, an' now he's goin' higher up. If yuh won't get out without raisin' a kick, yuh'll have to stand examinin' by the

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

medical board. An' yuh know how that's worked."

"Why don't he retire Brodrick?" Meaghan asked, plaintively.

Tighe did not answer. "I'm sorry," he went on. "I'm sorry, but it's like's not to be my call next. We're all of us gettin' stiff, I guess. They say yuh can't learn an ol' dog any new stunts —"

Captain Meaghan's anger had passed with his first indignant protests that he was being put out of the department for private or political reasons. He relapsed now into a silent apathy and resignation; and he stood in the center of his room to gaze at his swivel-chair and his desk of papers—the empty throne and office of his power—with a mute pathos of fixed eye and wrinkled forehead.

Tighe continued: "We all got to come to it sometime. An' it ain't as bad as lots of jobs I know, where a man's chucked out on

THE SMOKE - EATERS

the streets without a cent. Yuh'll have yer half-pay to live easy on, anyways."

Captain Meaghan sat down by the window, as if his desk were already occupied by the right of his successor. "Live!" he said. "I know how I'm goin' to live. But what'm I goin' to *do*? Where's my *work*?"

"Well, if I was you," Tighe said, "I'd guess I'd worked long enough."

Meaghan did not reply. He sank forward to rest his forearms on his knees and let his heavy hands hang down limp between them.

Tighe watched him in silence. There was nothing more that he could say, and yet he did not know how to get out of the room without saying something. He was looking wistfully at the door, when he was saved from an awkward exit by the jangling of the jigger with the first strokes of the alarm of fire; and he flung out of the room in a noisy haste that made an excuse of urgency out of an excess of bustle.

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

Captain Meaghan rose like an automaton to the bell, and reached down his cap from a hook in the corner. He put it on; and he seemed to grope and feel around the room with his eyes, in a bewildered and wandering gaze, as he did so. Then he turned to go out in a blind stumble; and he closed the door behind him, either absent-mindedly or in the way a woman will gently shut herself out of a room of happy memories when she leaves it to the past.

The truck was waiting for him impatiently. He nodded to the driver, and swung himself up to his place on the turntable as the horses sprang forward obliquely from the poles, with straining haunches, and the great machine rolled out on noiseless axles.

Lieutenant Gallegher was the only one who noticed that the captain put on his helmet wrong side before; and Gallegher noticed it because he had heard the rumor of changes in the battalion, and knew that Meaghan was

THE SMOKE - EATERS

in danger. The men on the side-step were either sleepily putting on their coats while they clung to the ladders, or were borrowing and lending the chewing tobacco with which they were accustomed to fortify themselves against the thirst and excitement of a fire. There was some chaffing among those on the other side of the truck, and the lieutenant glared at them through the rungs of the ladders, understanding from the captain's manner that Tighe's interview had brought "th' ol' man" his retirement; for Meaghan, instead of leaning out from the turntable to watch the street ahead and call unnecessary directions to the driver, was holding on with both hands, his face to the ladders, and swaying dizzily with the lurching of the truck.

When they swung around a street corner into the black belch of steamers, Gallegher had to say, "Here we are, sir," before Meaghan raised his eyes. Even then he did not

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

seem to waken. He did not get down until the truck had stopped; and he stood in the gutter, fumbling with his helmet — as if he noticed for the first time that it sat uneasily awry on his head — until Gallegher, having righted it for him, said “ Chief’s over there, sir,” and pointed out “ the Boss ” where he stood beside his carriage.

Meaghan shambled across the street to report the arrival of his company, with a dispirited “ No. 0, Chief.”

The head of the department, without turning to him, replied, impatiently: “ Get in, then. Get in. They don’t seem to be able to find the cursed fire.”

Meaghan looked up dully at the five-storied warehouse that showed a dark bulk of brick in the feeble light of the street-lamps. He saw smoke leaking out around the iron shutters of the second and third stories, as if from the joints of a dampered box-stove. He saw firemen on ladder tops, working to force

THE SMOKE - EATERS

an entrance through these shutters with crowbars and jimmies. A second story window had been opened, and a flaccid hose hung down empty from it to show that the blaze had not been found. And two engine crews, having coupled butts to hydrants and stretched their lines of hose, were waiting like soldiers in a night attack for the order to advance.

For one blank moment, Meaghan stood at gaze. Then he pushed back his helmet from his forehead; his face set in a thoughtful scowl; he spat at his feet; he looked up again, frowning. And, suddenly, he pulled down the peak of his helmet to his eyes, with the manner of a mind resolved, and bounded forward in a run across the paving-stones to his command.

“ Ground floor! ” he shouted. “ Break in the doors! ” Three of the company leaped at the truck and dragged out the battering-ram — a knobbed bar of iron, fitted with

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

handles for two men. "That's no good," he bawled angrily at them. "Get yer twenty-footer!"

Six of them dragged down the heavy ladder, caught it at both ends and the middle, and ran at full tilt with it against the warehouse doors. "Hit on the lock!" he yelled.

Lieutenant Gallegher suggested, mildly: "Smoke's all up above, sir."

Meaghan brushed him aside as the impact of the half-dozen men, behind the steel-shod weight of wood, struck the doors a blow that burst them open with a crash of splintered planking and the sharp report of snapped metal.

"Get in, now," Meaghan cried. "Get in! Never mind yer lights. Yuh can't open yer eyes in there. Get yer axes." Gallegher dropped his lantern and ran to them. Smoke had begun to thicken in the doorway. They stopped to drag out their ladder. "Oh,

THE SMOKE - EATERS

hell! ” Meaghan yelled. “ Get in, will yuh? Find the fire! Find the fire! ”

Three of them, armed from the truck, disappeared after Gallegher into the smoke. Meaghan sent three others to support them, and hurried out into the road to see the front of the building; and now, as he looked up from the smoke of the doorway to the smoke of the windows and down again, he jerked his head backward and forward abruptly and spasmodically, with an old man's exaggerated alertness in the set of his chin. He ran back to the door. “ Try the elevator-shaft,” he shouted in.

The cry that replied to him sounded from above him, as if the men were groping their way up the stairs; and this was not what he had intended that they should do. He rushed out into the street to look up again at the smoke in the windows. He found it thinned and lessened, and with an oath of exasperation he charged back into the door-

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

way and shouted, "Come down here and feel the floors! Feel the floors!" He got no answer. He waved to the rest of the company to follow him, and plunged headlong into the choking heat and darkness.

When the old fireman's "sixth sense" warned him of obstacles in his path, he dropped on hands and knees to scuttle forward on flat palms over the smooth hard wood. He stopped, in a moment, to take off his helmet and lay his cheek to the planks. He scrambled on again — knocking against a packing-case that scraped his bare temple with its tin "straps." When he stopped a second time he put his ear to the floor. Then he jumped to his feet, ran forward blindly, struck against a tin-sheathed door that was loosely hung, and fell panting at the crack beneath it.

He could hear, unmistakably, the quiet grumble of stifled flames. And the flooring was hot under his hands.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

With that, he turned on all-fours, followed his path back with an unerring sense of direction, shouldered into the packing-case, picked up his helmet, rose to his feet, and ran for the doorway, shouting to the men who were groping around him in the darkness.

Two of Gallegher's squad were coughing and gasping in the street. "Report No. 0 finds fire in the basement," he cried in a heart-lifting exultation; "comin' up th' elevator-shaft! . . . Smash in those dead-lights. Get yer cellar pipe!"

One of the men darted out into the confusion of the street to find the chief. Before the other could reach the truck, Meaghan had picked out the steel maul and was attacking the dead-lights with it. And swung with the stiff, short blows of strong shoulders, he drove it through thick glass and cracking cast iron with the accuracy of a stone-breaker.

His men joined them with their axes; and

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

while they were still working there, Gallagher came out, choking and coughing, from the stairs. He saw Meaghan working with the maul like a common truckman, and he did not understand the sight. He went over to him. The captain tossed him the heavy hammer, ordered him to take the men into the cellar, and hurried back to the truck for an ax. He was met by an engine company dragging a line of hose. "Come on here," he greeted them. "Fire's in the back;" and led them into the ground floor on the double.

Gallegher looked up at him as he passed, and remained staring after him when he was lost in the smoke. He knew it was Meaghan's place to remain with his own company. He supposed—from what he could guess of the condition of the captain's mind—that the old man, stung with the thought of his retirement, would commit some folly that would endanger his life. He turned to one of

THE SMOKE - EATERS

the crew. "Look after this," he said; and, shutting his teeth with a snap on the stifle that puffed into his face, he began to track up the line of hose which Meaghan had led in.

He found the air at once almost unbreathable, the heat unendurable; but he made better progress, on the sure trail, than the men who had preceded him, and he quickly overtook the foreman of the engine company, who, with his two pipemen, was following on hands and knees after Meaghan, whom they had lost. Gallegher heard the captain's call ahead of them, and he groped forward in the direction of the voice, to find Meaghan snaking in through the smoke, dragging his ax as if he were crawling in a burrow.

Gallegher threw himself beside him. "Start yer water," Meaghan ordered. "We can't make that door. She's loose, anyway. The stream'll bring her down."

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

“It’s me — Gallegher,” the lieutenant stammered.

“What? What’s the matter?” Meaghan asked, thickly. “What d’yuh want? . . . Eh?”

Gallegher began: “I thought you’d — I thought —” It was impossible to confess what he had thought.

“Some one wants me?” Meaghan asked. He got no answer.

“Who wants me?”

Gallegher did not answer.

He had, in fact, taken advantage of the darkness to retreat from his mistake. “He’s over to the right there,” he said hurriedly to the pipemen as he passed; and he came out on the street red and flustered with the consciousness of having made an indiscreet fool of himself.

He was standing over the men at their work of lowering a ladder into the basement, when the captain came unexpectedly out to

THE SMOKE - EATERS

him. "What?" he said, looking around him for a superior officer. "Who wants me?"

Gallegher struggled with a clumsy lie, in an abashed silence. Meaghan glared at him. "Who wanted me?" he demanded.

The lieutenant did not answer; he looked up with a piteously appealing eye. The truth dawned on the captain. "What the —" He choked. "What d'yuh — What the devil!"

Gallegher eased his helmet. "Well," he tried to explain, "I was afraid you'd —"

"Afraid I'd what?" Meaghan bellowed at him. "Ain't I old enough to take care o' my —" The words stopped him. "Well, by G—," he swore. "That's it, is it? Yuh got the chief's bat, have yuh?" He shook his fist in the lieutenant's eyes. "When I want a nurse, I'll tell yuh, — — yuh. You cubs, yuh'd 've been huntin' fer this blaze yet if it hadn't been fer me."

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

A muffled cry of "Start your water!" sounded from within.

The fireman on the threshold took up the cry and sent it bounding from man to man, like a tossed ball, over the tumult of the street, into the echoing gorge of high buildings at the corner.

Meaghan took off his helmet and threw it in Gallegher's face. "Blast yer eyes," he cried. "Why can't yuh mind yer own business? Yuh think yuh know it all, don't yuh? If I didn't know no more'n *you* about a fire —"

The hose at their feet writhed, swelled, and stiffened to the size of a gigantic serpent. "You obey orders, see?" Meaghan cried. "I'm cap'n of this comp'ny, yet awhile;" and with a last furious oath, he turned and darted back into the doorway.

Gallegher put a hand across his bruised mouth. "Darn his old hide," he said; "I'll show him I got 's much right in there as

THE SMOKE - EATERS

him;” and kicking aside the captain’s helmet, he followed doggedly in.

When Captain Meaghan reached the nozzle again, he found the pipemen lying drenched with the water that beat back on them from the near wall in a refreshingly cool spray. He shouted to them to turn the stream to the left, where he knew the door to be. They could not hear him. He crawled over one of them to push the nozzle aside, and the man promptly gave place to him. He lay down beside the pipe and directed it blindly; and in a moment the powerful stream struck the tin sheathing with a roaring weight that burst the door from its hinges into a hissing fire.

The heat leaped out on them before a live puff of flame, and Captain Meaghan felt the man beside him kick and struggle with the pain and stings of scorched hands and cracking lips. Then the nozzle tried to lash

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

free of his grip; the remaining pipeman clambered over his legs, and he was left alone.

He rolled over on the hose to pin it down, rested the nozzle on his arm, and hid his face beside it where he could get the little air that was freed from the stream. His anger against Gallegher and the chief set his jaws in a determination to beat back the fire, even though he *was* helpless before *them*. And that truly Irish resolution held them until the first torture of the heat had slowly passed and left him numb and drowsy in that effect of physical ease which precedes death by fire as it precedes death by freezing.

He was roused by the touch of a hand on his boot-heel; it closed tightly around his instep and tugged at his leg; and he kicked out impatiently to show that he was in no need of help. A man crawled up over him and loosened his hands from the nozzle — which immediately wriggled free of him and

THE SMOKE - EATERS

began to thresh about on the floor. He protested angrily, trying to catch the hose again. A pair of strong arms closed under his chest, turned him, lifted him, and threw him suddenly over a broad shoulder. He fought with the smooth tarpaulin of a turn-out coat until his knees were pinned together in the crook of an arm, and his rescuer, straightening his back to the load, rose swaying and began to run through the smoke toward the doorway.

Slung head down, and choked with the rush of blood to his throat, Meaghan caught speechlessly at the man's legs in a vain attempt to trip him. He might as well have tried to hold back a runaway horse by leaning down out of the saddle to catch its hoofs; the fireman went ahead with him unheedingly. The crew of an engine company, hurrying into the fire, bumped against them. He got a breath of cooler air, and he beat on the rubber coat in an inarticulate

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

fury. Then, as he was borne out of the doorway, he caught a glimpse of the street, turned topsyturvy, and the fear of making his situation still more laughable before his command held him ragingly still and silent.

His rescuer bent forward to heave him upright on his feet, and stood back from him warily. And he saw that it was Gallegher.

If he had had an ax in his hand, he would have killed the lieutenant on the spot. Having no weapon, he leaped at him, without a word, not striking him, but clutching for his throat, in the primitive instinct of the savage to use his fingers as claws. Gallegher wrapped him in a tender embrace, threw him carefully on the flagstones, and sat on his chest. He raved and fought in a panting struggle to wriggle himself free, growling like an animal, his face blackened with smoke and fire, his eyes red-rimmed like the "haws" of a mastiff, his teeth gleaming through a singed mustache.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

Some one said over Gallegher's shoulder:
"What's wrong here?"

The lieutenant forced down a straining arm and answered, through his teeth: "Man gone fire crazy!"

"Yuh're a liar!" Meaghan yelled.
"Yuh're a liar! Yuh're a li-i-—" Gallegher shifted his weight to the captain's diaphragm, and he ended in a grunting groan.

The voice above them said: "Get off him;" and Gallegher looked up to recognize the chief.

He rose with a stubborn reluctance. Meaghan sprang unsteadily to his feet. He was weak almost to the point of tears. "He's been — chasin' me 'round all night," he said. "Haulin' me out of everywhere I got an'—"

"You've been tryin' to get yerself burned alive," Gallegher cut in. "An' when I carried him out of a blazing fire, he tried to throttle me. Look at him!" He pointed to the blackened face of his captain.

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

“ Ain’t I able to take care of myself? ”
Meaghan cried.

“ No, you ain’t,” Gallegher said. “ You’ve been running wild around here all night. You’re not right. You know you’re not.”

“ What’s wrong about him? ” the chief interposed.

“ I don’t know,” Gallegher said, sulkily.

“ There ain’t anything wrong about me,” Meaghan complained. “ I wanted to take a whirl out o’ the fire — seein’ it was goin’ to be my last. . . . And I did, too,” he boasted. “ I found it. An’ I’d ’ve held it in the shaft there, if that — — hadn’t yanked me out.”

The chief stroked his mustache. “ What do you say it’s your ‘ last ’ for? ”

Meaghan frowned at him. “ Tighe said *you* said — ”

The chief shook his head slowly. “ I told Tighe that either Brodrick or you ought to give place to a younger man.”

THE SMOKE - EATERS

Meaghan looked down at his rubber boots. "I don't want to squeeze out Brodrick, either. If I got to go, I'll go."

The chief stood aside for the entrance of another engine company. "Well," he ruled, "you can do as you like about it. Brodrick fell off a ladder over there, and broke his hip. He's out anyway. You can go, too, if you want to. Nobody's going to prevent you, but nobody's going to force you, either." He followed into the burning building after the pipemen.

Meaghan looked up at Gallegher. Gallegher looked away.

He saw the captain's much abused helmet lying on the curb, and went to pick it up.

Meaghan took it from him, and clapped it on his head.

"It's lucky I didn't have anything to hit yuh with," he growled.

"Yes, sir," Gallegher answered, meekly.

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

Meaghan glared at him. "Well, what in — did yuh do it fer?"

"I thought there was something wrong with you," Gallegher apologized. "I didn't want you to get — to get hurt."

The captain snorted his contempt. "Who told *you* to think? You obey orders — that's your business."

Gallegher raised a humble eye to him. "Yes, sir," he said.

Meaghan scowled and swallowed. Gallegher waited in a pose of humility that it would have been inhuman to abuse. "Where's the boys?" the captain demanded.

"In the cellar," Gallegher replied.

"Well," he said, with heavy sarcasm, "don't yuh think it's about time yuh yanked them out?"

And when the lieutenant was descending the ladder, Meaghan looked up at the smoking windows and down on the crown of Galle-

THE SMOKE - EATERS

gher's helmet with his old mouth twisted in what seemed to be the grim suppression of a smile.

“ Look here, Gallegher,” he said that night, “ Brodrick's out o' bus'ness. There'll be an examination fer promotion among you boys; an' I know you'll pass that all right. Well, I'm goin' to report you fer havin' saved my life, see? ” He blinked away a smile. “ Fer havin' carried me away from a burnin' elevator-shaft at yer own risk — ”

Gallegher rubbed his nose and smiled nervously.

“ I loaded up one o' them newspaper touts that way. My own report to Headquarters ought to cinch it fer yuh, eh? ” He laughed at Gallegher's expression. “ Eh? ” he chuckled. “ Eh? ”

Gallegher enjoyed the joke, but shook his head over it. “ The chief's on, sir, isn't he? ”

A QUESTION OF RETIREMENT

“ You leave the chief to me,” Meaghan said. “ I’ll fix that. . . . Here, have a cigar.”

Gallegher took it and sat down. He fastened his eyes on it. He turned it over. He reddened. He said, thickly: “ Much obliged, captain. I—I’ll be sorry to leave No. 0.”

Meaghan jabbed his cigar into his mouth and hastened to busy himself striking a light. When he was behind a cloud of smoke, he coughed and said: “ That’s all right, Gallegher. That’s all right.”

It was as near as either of them ever came to achieving pathos.

IX

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

CAPTAIN MEAGHAN sat down at his desk, lighted a black cigar, and began to smoke thoughtfully, with long pauses between puffs, leaning forward in his chair as if his shoulders weighed him down, and staring at the reports in their pigeon-holes with the vacant eyes of an ox. There was trouble in the company — ever since Lieutenant Gallagher's promotion it had been brewing; and the new lieutenant, Scully, did not seem able to do more than bring tales of it to the office; and Sergeant Pim's successor, " Long Tom " Donnelly, did nothing but evade responsibility and stand aloof.

From being one of the most efficient crews.

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

in the department, it had already come to this: the men were responding so tardily to the call of the jigger that a rival hook-and-ladder company had taken two fires from them in their own district within two weeks. When Meaghan had been officially censured for that slowness, he had had to put the blame on a new and badly trained horse. He had consulted with Lieutenant Scully, then; and Scully had accused Gallegher of having been lax with the men. "An' they're sore," he had said, "because I'm tryin' to tune them up." Meaghan had replied, loftily: "Pick out the first man that balks, an' send him to *me*." And now Scully had reported Corrigan — of all men! — for insolence and disobedience of orders at the fire from which the company had just returned.

Meaghan smoked. It would be possible for him to make an example of Corrigan that would awe the whole crew; but would it make affairs any better? There must be

THE SMOKE - EATERS

something wrong at the root of things. . . . He chewed on his cigar, and rubbed his forehead, and blew a long breath through his nose.

He knew he was not diplomatic, that he was not wily; what he wanted was a plain mark to go at with his head down, like a bull. And because he could see no mark — could not decide whether it was Corrigan, or Scully, or the whole crew that was at fault — he remained chafing miserably, bewildered by his own inability to choose a course and run it blind.

Meanwhile, Corrigan came up-stairs to the bunkroom in his coat and helmet, and sat down on the side of his cot. It was evident, from this proceeding, that he was out of hand; for the rules of the department required that coats and helmets be left in their allotted places on the truck. And when he uncovered his head, the light of the gas-jet above him showed his face drawn up, white

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

and quivering, with the anger and menace of a clenched fist.

He had a villainous dark eyebrow that bridged his nose, and a blue-black jowl of bristles that seemed to be always in need of a razor; and now his eyebrows met over a bloodshot glare of eyes that were red from the smart of heat and smoke; his great hand opened and closed on his knee, like the paw of a clawed beast; and when he licked his lips — that had been dried by the fire he had been fighting — he worked them free of his teeth with the grimace of a snarl, his whole face twitching, his eyes set and glassy.

They were the eyes of a man hypnotized; and he was, in fact, just such. He was fighting, in his fancy, through a savage struggle with Lieutenant Scully; and it was a soul-satisfying fight of swinging blows and back-wrenching clinches, that grew fiercer and fiercer as it progressed, until (to the imagined applause of "Long Tom" Donnelly)

THE SMOKE - EATERS

he threw his opponent on the floor, and fell on him to choke him, and cried: "Yuh wud, wud yuh? Yuh wud, wud yuh?" as he strangled him. It was a struggle that was no sooner ended, in the lieutenant's insensibility, than it began again, like a series in a cinematograph, and threshed itself out with untiring fury. And it was a struggle that increased Corrigan's thirst for revenge with a mirage of the appeasement of it, carrying him beyond any consideration of the duties of his position, or the discipline demanded by his uniform, or the penalty to be exacted from insubordination.

He could hear the crew, down-stairs, rearranging the apparatus and returning the horses to their stalls; but the sounds stood back, like a circle of spectators, from his fisticuffs. When he heard Meaghan cough in his room, he looked up from the prostrate Scully, for a moment, to shake a fist at the passing thought of the captain, and then

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

began again on the enemy with a word and a blow. It was not until he heard the voice of Scully himself — using the desk telephone to report the fire to Headquarters — that he woke to the realities, and passed his hand across his face, and looked blinking around him for the aid and counsel of his backer, Donnelly. The room was empty. He rose unsteadily and threw off his rubber coat, trying in vain to swallow a burning dryness that stuck in his throat; and he found himself very hot and thirsty. He stood a moment glowering at the captain's door, and then stumbled down the passageway between the rows of cots, to get a drink in the bathroom.

When the other men came to their beds, they heard him splashing in the tub. They knew that he had not asked the necessary permission to put himself so beyond answering an alarm. "He's fired," Morphy said.

"Long Tom" Donnelly replied that if he

THE SMOKE - EATERS

was not yet fired, he soon would be; and furthermore that the crew would see him go without daring to raise a murmur. "Yuh've took more from Scully than a gang o' niggers," he told them. "Yuh've let him drive yuh like a lot o' muts. He's been puttin' it all over yuh an' rubbin' it in — an' yuh've done nothin' but sulk." In his unprejudiced opinion, they were the poorest crew of mean-spirited and condemned dogs that ever handled a hook.

Morphy invited him to distinguish himself among them by taking the initiative. He replied by inviting Morphy to betake himself to bottomless perdition. He would not raise a finger for them, he said. Not a finger! And with that announcement, he began to strip off his turn-out of boots and trousers, and prepare himself for bed.

Now Donnelly was a man who — without any achievement of his own — imposed respect on his fellows by his superior con-

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

tempt for the works of others. He had the power of the born critic, and the prestige. Lieutenant Scully had slighted him from the first, and had marked him out for special enmity as time went on, suspecting—and rightly too—that Donnelly was the sly instigator of half the difficulties which he was having with the men. Donnelly, for his part, had pretended to be blind to this animosity, and bore it with a disdainful composure that was designedly irritating. It was not until Scully began systematically to harass Corrigan that Donnelly came out among the men as the acknowledged enemy of the new lieutenant, and showed a friendship for Corrigan that rapidly became a whispering intimacy. The crew believed that he had even egged Corrigan on to the outbreak which had occurred at the fire.

Naturally, under these circumstances, they had looked to him for leadership in this crisis, and his contemptuous desertion of

THE SMOKE - EATERS

them at once excited and depressed them. They stood around in the dim light of the bunkroom, muttering subdued grumblings of disgust and discontent that were ominous of a gathering storm, but of a storm that was still distant and uncertain. One man vented a sudden spite on his innocent boots, which he threw at the wall beside his bed. Morphy, who had sat with his chin in his hand, heard Corrigan slushing the water about in the tub, looked up as if he were about to speak, and then slowly sank back on himself again, spitting mutinously on the floor. The others had a manner of waiting for a blow to rouse them; they made no move to "turn in," beyond sitting down on the sides of their cots.

They saw Lieutenant Scully come out of the captain's room and go down-stairs.

And then Meaghan threw open his door and called "Corrigan!"—and they all drew themselves up for the climax. The

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

captain was standing black against the light that shone from his desk; and they looked at him as if measuring in him the authority against which they had been incited to rebel.

“Where’s Corrigan?” he cried.

He received no answer.

He set his chin. “Donnelly,” he called.

“Come here.”

“Long Tom” rose from his cot, slouched indifferently across the room in his underclothes, and followed the captain into his office.

“Where’s Corrigan?” Meaghan asked, turning at his desk.

Donnelly answered, stolidly: “I don’t know. He’s washin’ himself, I think. Takin’ a bath.”

Meaghan frowned at him. He wished to ask an explanation of the trouble among the men, but the majesty of office would not let him bend to it now. “Who gave him leave?” he demanded, threateningly.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

Donnelly raised a sandy eyebrow with an expression of his yellow face that asked if *he*, then, was supposed to be in charge of the house.

The captain flushed. "Tell him I want to see him," he said, in a gruff attempt to recover his dignity.

Donnelly went out obediently with the order; but he did not deliver it. He turned slyly at his cot to see whether the captain was watching him; and, finding that the eye of authority was elsewhere, he lay down again. He did not answer the questions of the men. He closed his eyes and watched the captain's door under stealthy lids.

Meaghan seated himself at his desk and smoked an inch of his cigar, patiently. He had been unable to get any explanation of the situation from his lieutenant. He intended to examine Corrigan, who, at least, was not a man of guile.

When he looked up at the clock, a muscle

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

tightened in his jaw, his eyes puckered, and he closed his lips tightly on the cigar. In a while he began to puff at it again, with an irritated impatience.

He exploded, at last, in an oath, pushed back his chair, and strode to the door. "Donnelly!" he shouted, and began to walk up and down the carpet.

The innocent Donnelly stood calm in the doorway. The captain plucked the cigar from between his teeth. "Tell Corrigan I want him. Tell him I want him *here*—*now!*" He emphasized the words with two heavy blows on the desk top.

Donnelly turned an expressionless back on him and departed—to his cot again.

Two minutes passed. Three minutes passed. Captain Meaghan bit into his cigar. Five insolent minutes—three hundred contemptuous seconds—ticked placidly on the clock.

He flung himself at the door and yelled:

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“Donnelly! Donnelly! Tell that — —
Corrigan that if he don't come here in two
shakes I'll yank him out o' that bath an'
trun him in the street.” His voice echoed
through the building in a roar.

Donnelly went, with a thin-lipped smile,
to the bathroom, and was met at the door of
it by Corrigan, who came out with a towel
around his middle, dripping and unclothed.
The water trickled down from his hair over
a face that was knit in a white passion. He
walked boldly into the captain's office, leav-
ing a wet trail behind him. “What d'yuh
want?”

Meaghan glared and swallowed, fighting
down a rush of anger that swelled in his
neck. Corrigan, breathing hard, watched
him under beaded eyebrows. The towel be-
gan to slip from his hips; he held it with
his hands.

The captain controlled himself to ask:
“Where've yuh been?”

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

Corrigan answered: "Takin' a wash."

Meaghan struck out a venomous forefinger at him. "Yuh *were*," he cried. "Yuh were, were yuh? Well, I'll fix yuh fer this. What d'yuh mean by comin' in here without yer clothes? By —, I'll kick y' out o' here like a dog!"

Corrigan bared his lower teeth. "That's it," he snarled. "Like a dog! There's been about enough o' this dog bus'ness between you an' Scully. There ain't no dogs in this crew, an' there ain't goin' to be treated like none, see?"

Captain Meaghan threw aside his cigar, and stood back from him, the veins dilating in his forehead.

"Since Scully come in here," Corrigan went on, thickly, "it ain't fit fer no man — not fer no man. It's about time yuh let up, see? We ain't goin' to stan' fer it."

Meaghan, in his helplessness, began to browbeat him with all the epithets of abuse

THE SMOKE - EATERS

that his rage could recollect. Corrigan waved the towel at him contemptuously. "Y' ol' bull-head," he sneered. "Yuh're both o' yuh nothin' but a pair o' muts."

Meaghan rushed at him. Corrigan side-stepped and flicked the wet towel in his face; and the tail of it, cracking like a whip-lash, struck the captain across the eyes and blinded him. He went past, inarticulate, into the arms of Lieutenant Scully, who had hurried up-stairs at the noises of the quarrel and came running in to clinch with the infuriated captain and hold him.

The crew rushed into the room and surrounded him. "Long Tom" Donnelly hooked Corrigan out of the jostle by the elbow and returned him grimly to his bath. "Keep stripped," he said. "An' wet," he added. "There's a fight comin'."

Lieutenant Scully cleared the office and shut the door on the men, while the captain, with a hand over his smarting right eye and

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

blinking wildly with his left one, stamped around the room, sputtering. The lieutenant judged it the part of wisdom to pretend that he did not understand the situation. "Somethin' in yer eye, sir?" he asked, politely.

Captain Meaghan did not hear. He had stumbled into the waste-paper basket, and he stopped to kick it across the room. The scraps of torn paper rose like a flock of frightened birds. Scully watched them settle. "Somethin' in yer eye?" he repeated, delicately.

The captain turned on him, snorting with pain and rage. "What?" he yelled. "You — you — Where's that — — Corri-gan?" He broke into an unintelligible abuse of Corrigan, the crew, and the silent Scully. "What've yuh been doin' to them?" he cried. "Don't yuh know no more about handlin' men? The whole — company's up."

THE SMOKE - EATERS

Scully faced the storm with a thoughtful narrowing of his eyes. "They'll hear yuh out there," he warned him.

"He hit me," Meaghan roared.

"Who?"

"Corrigan! *Corrigan!* ! CORRIGAN!!!"

The lieutenant stood with his back to the door and settled his face in a frown to hide the jubilant thought that he had his situation well in hand. The quarrel was the captain's now. The men would have old Meaghan to deal with; and behind Meaghan was the authority of the whole department to crush them down.

Scully, on his first coming to the truck-house, had taken his cue from Meaghan's manner and acted the minor autocrat with the men. After struggling against their covert intractability for almost a month, he had decided to provoke some one of them to open hostility; he had picked on Corrigan as the least formidable among them, and had

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

persecuted him with every form of official oppression. The result was excellent — from his present point of view.

He relaxed the anxiety of his forehead. The captain continued to thresh about the room, seemingly in a blind fury. He threw his cap from him; he tore off his coat; he flung aside the desk chair that was in his way; and he worked himself into a greater rage with every attack on the defencelessness of these inanimate victims of his wrath. But this was his purpose exactly; for, behind his impulse to anger, there was the recognition of a need to spur himself on to a desperate recklessness. And by one of those anomalies that make even the mental processes of a Meaghan intricate, in the midst of a speechless frenzy, he was aware that he was making a pretence of it in order to frighten the men; and at the same time that he was apparently blind with rage, he was as cunningly cool-thoughted as a madman.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

It was this complexity that deceived and betrayed Lieutenant Scully.

The captain rushed at the door. Scully barred his way.

“Hol’ on, now,” the lieutenant said. “Yuh don’t want to — ”

“Wha-at!” Meaghan choked.

“Yuh can fire Corrigan. Yuh can’t fight him. He’s too big a man. . . . Better leave this bus’ness till to-morrow.”

The captain exploded again. Was this all Scully knew about handling men? Corrigan had struck him — *him!* — his captain. The whole company would laugh at him. His authority was threatened. It was not a matter of discharging a man. It was necessary to awe a whole company.

Scully did not move. “Yuh’d better leave them alone fer the night,” he advised; and his politic manner set him aside as a disinterested mediator in the quarrel.

“It’s all *your* doin’,” Meaghan shouted.

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

“ Gallegher didn’t have none of it. *You* come in here an’ stir up trouble with the boys, an’ then yuh leave *me* to settle it — ”

Now Scully had a poor opinion of his captain, as a man at once too simply direct in his methods and too violently blustering. He shrugged his shoulders with an insolence that was not wise.

Meaghan caught the sneer and went white. He checked himself, and, with his face still working and contorted, he confronted Scully. They faced each other, the captain searching the guilty trace of his assistant’s thought, the lieutenant reddening under the scrutiny, unable to look away, his eye wavering, his lips caught in the curled wrinkle of his treacherous expression.

“ All right,” Meaghan said at last, with a deadly calmness. “ All right. We’ll see. . . . *You* go an’ bring Corrigan here.”

Scully flicked his eyelids. “ What for? ”

“ Go an’ bring Corrigan here.”

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“ Better leave ’m alone fer the night, hadn’t we? ”

Meaghan nodded fiercely. “ That’s all right. I’m in charge o’ this comp’ny. I order *you* to go out there an’ bring Corrigan.”

Scully looked down, looked up, cleared his throat, and began apologetically: “ Well, say — ”

Meaghan drew back his elbows, clenching his hands. “ Will yuh g’ out an’ bring Corrigan? ”

Scully went.

He found “ Long Tom ” Donnelly outside the door — where he had been listening to the quarrel. “ Where’s Corrigan? ” the lieutenant asked.

“ In the bathroom,” Donnelly answered, promptly.

“ Go ’n bring ’m here. The captain wants him.”

Donnelly grinned drily, and walked away

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

to his cot as if he had not heard. The men snickered. Scully started for the bathroom with a jerk.

He went down the passageway between the cots, stiff-kneed and pale. He rapped on the door of the bathroom. "Corrigan," he called. "Captain wants yuh."

The voice was false with nervousness, but Corrigan recognized it. He knew that he had struck his captain; that he would be discharged from the fire department; that he was beyond hope. And this was the voice of the man who had been the cause of his ruin.

He threw open the door and sprang on Scully like an Indian. The lieutenant had not time to cry out. He went down, choked by the clutch at his throat. "Yuh wud?" Corrigan panted. "Yuh little scut, yuh! I'll learn yuh!" He rolled him over, throttled, and began to spank him with an open hand.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

The men crowded together in a ring around them, and grinned and gloated in a breathless silence, watching the captain's door over their shoulders. It was not only their revenge on Scully; it was so ridiculous a degradation of the lieutenant that they knew he would never be able again to face them with an order.

Some one whispered hoarsely: "Here's th' ol' man!" They hustled Corrigan into the bathroom and shoved back into line on either side of the passageway — down which Captain Meaghan was approaching — like a crew of mutineers ready with their grievances,

"What's all this?"

The dazed lieutenant — helped to a chair by Donnelly — put his hand across the back of his neck and raised his head carefully, with the evident intention of replying. But the watchful Donnelly picked up his cap from the floor for him, and clapped it on him with

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

a suddenness that cut him short in a grunt; and before he could get the peak of the cap off his eyes, "Long Tom" had caught up Corrigan's towel, too, and smothered the lieutenant in it on the pretence of stopping his bleeding nose.

Meaghan turned to the men. They shifted uneasily on their feet and cast their eyes around for a spokesman. "By G——," he broke out, "I didn't think yuh'd 've done it. I've stood up fer *youse* many's the time. I've kep' y'out o' harm's way in fires that's killed whole crews — an' *you* know it. An' if yuh'd 've come to me with this here trouble — whatever it is — an' I don't know yet — I'd 've fixed it fer yuh — an' yuh know *that*, too."

The men muttered, looking anywhere but at him. He caught Corrigan's name in the general growl.

"I didn't touch Corrigan," he cried. "An' I wouldn't 've tried to if he hadn't

THE SMOKE - EATERS

struck me in the face with a towel — without — without cause, either — ”

“ Cap’n,” Corrigan called out, shouldering through the men, “ I didn’t mean fer to hit yuh. I didn’t mean to. An’ I wudn’t ’ve said what I did, neither, if I hadn’t been crazy raw. That’s the trut’, now. I wasn’t knowin’ what I said. Scully’s got me so sore I was crazy. I wudn’t ’ve done it. No, I wudn’t. I wudn’t ’ve done it.” He shook his head with a sideways nod of affirmation. “ That’s right, an’ I want to say I’m d—— sorry I did do it, what’s more. But Scully — ”

The men muttered a hoarse chorus of assent. That was the root of the whole trouble. Scully —

“ He’s been pickin’ on me, an’ poundin’ me, an’ chasin’ me aroun’ like — like the devil. An’ down at the blaze there, jus’ because he saw I was done out an’ about choked, he ordered me in again where there was more

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

men 'n enough as it was — an' — an' then — that's how it was. An' when I knowed I was goin' to get broke, I didn't care what I did. Donnelly there'll tell yuh if that ain't right."

Donnelly, thus appealed to, turned an impartial eye on Scully, who sat bending forward with the towel to his face. "This ain't my quarrel, cap'n," he lied. "I got nothin' against the lieut'nt, an' I don't know what he's got against Corrigan. But I want to say this, cap'n, if any man treated me the way *he* did Corrigan, I'd 've killed him — that's what I'd 've done — if I'd swunged fer it nex' minute." He met the captain's startled look with a solemnity that was convincing beyond words.

The men endorsed the statement with an unanimous and confused approval.

Scully jumped up. "That'll do," Meaghan cried, in the manner of a magistrate. "I'm conductin' this."

The lieutenant replied with a contemp-

THE SMOKE - EATERS

tnous snort that brought the captain flaming around on him. "An' I can tell *you*," Meaghan cried, "that yuh can't stay in this comp'ny, see?—not for what's been said here, neither, but fer what I seen of yuh t'night —"

Scully interrupted him by brushing past him and swaggering off up the bunkroom to the office door. Meaghan scowled him off, and remained scowling thoughtfully after he was gone.

"Corrigan," he decided, "I'm goin' to recommend that you be broke." He drew himself up with an air of authority. "The rest of you men go to bed."

Corrigan spoke up. "All right, cap'n. I'm not kickin'. I'm sorry I hit yuh. That's a fact. If I'd been right, I wudn't 've done it."

The captain turned his back on him without replying, and waited for the men to go to their beds. They filed past moodily. Cor-

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

rigan stopped to add: "Yuh needn't be afeard but what I'm gettin' the worst of it. I got to get out to-morra an' look fer a job. An' I've put in the best year of me life right here, at that. I wisht —"

Captain Meaghan spun around on him. "Darn you," he cried. "Shut up, will yuh?"

"All right," Corrigan answered, meekly. "I'm not kickin'. I'm done. . . . Where's my pants?"

Meaghan went back to his office; and Donnelly, standing by the bathroom door, stroked his thin mustache and smiled a smile of triumph under it. "All right," he said to Corrigan behind his hand. "Leave this to me. You ain't broke yet." He winked. "If a man on'y raises row enough in a house, they don't want to do anythin' but shut the windows. Headquarters 'll never hear o' *this!*"

The captain shut himself in his room and

THE SMOKE - EATERS

sat down to face the fact that there had been a scene in his truck-house which no explanations could excuse. A whole company had revolted and turned against its officers. The dismissal of Corrigan, or the transferal of Lieutenant Scully — or both — would not change that fact. The fault was higher up; it was in the captain in whose company such things were possible; and he knew the chief of the department would judge it so. It meant the end of his command.

And suddenly he found himself ready to go. Gallegher was gone; Pim was gone; even his old rival Brodrick was no longer in charge of the neighboring engine-house to give the zest of competition to the work. The company had filled up with young men in whom he had no interest; and the big, good-natured "Balloon" Corrigan, for whom, of all the crew, he had had a gruff liking — even from Corrigan he had had no loyalty and no respect.

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

He put his elbows on the desk, took his chin in his hands, and gazed at a past that was bitter and a future that was not bright.

He sat so until it was nearly midnight. Then he sent for Corrigan; and "Corrigan," he said, "I ain't broke a man since I been in the department, an' I ain't goin' to begin now on *you*. Yuh done wrong, an' yuh know it. Yuh should 've come that first time I sent fer yuh. Yuh — "

"What? I shud 've what? "

"Yuh should 've come when I sent Donnelly fer yuh."

Corrigan slowly shook his head. "Donnelly never come fer me. I didn't know yuh wanted me till I heard yuh yellin'."

Meaghan started like a man who has come suddenly on a snake. "Yuh didn't!"

"No, sir, I didn't."

The captain clenched his right hand, shook it over his head, and brought it down in the palm of his left with a smack. "*That's*

THE SMOKE - EATERS

what Pim meant! *That's* what Gallegher warned me! *That's* the man! That's the *man!* ”

Corrigan began to stammer out a friendly lie to shield his Iago. Meaghan strode to the door. “ Donnelly! ”

“ Long Tom ” came slouching nonchalantly in.

Meaghan closed the door on him. “ Why didn't yuh tell Corrigan I wanted him? ”

Donnelly snapped a glance at Corrigan, and then made time by coughing and wiping his mustache with the back of his hand.

Meaghan waited.

“ Well, sir, ” he said at last, “ I look at this thing this way: there's an affair's occurred in this house that's goin' to get us all on the carpet if we don't keep it quiet. We're all to blame, an' we'll all get raked if the chief knows it. I think the best thing 'd be to say no more about it. Lieutenant Scully 'll probably sooner get himself transferred without

A PERSONALLY CONDUCTED REVOLT

too much talk. Corrigan here ain't to blame — *much*. He lost his temper where any man'd 've done it. If yuh let 'm off this time with a warnin', that's all that need be, an' your own responsibility fer havin' a whole crew kick over the traces on account of Scully — well, that needn't go any higher up, neither."

Meaghan nodded. "That'll do, Tom. From first to last yuh've been the sour spot in this crew. I know *your* sort. You'd make trouble any time, fer the sake o' raisin' the smell. Yuh're a skunk — that's all. An' yuh're out o' the fire department 'forth-with,' see? I'm goin' to quit myself, but I'm goin' to take *you* with me. . . . Git now! Git!"

X

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CAPTAIN MEAGHAN had wakened in his own flat, a gentleman of leisure with a record to be proud of and a pension to support the pride. But he had wakened to the monotony of a life that was to be an unending holiday henceforth; and he rose in a bad mood.

The silver loving-cup, presented to him on the previous evening by Battalion Chief Tighe, on behalf of the men of Hook and Ladder Company No. 0, sat on the oilcloth of the dining-room table while he ate his breakfast. The illuminated address, which assured him that the fire department lost in him a man of "sterling worth," stood on

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

the painted mantelpiece before him. A reporter, looking for a "special" for his Sunday paper, came to ask for an interview with him before the table was cleared. But none of these evidences of honor eased his frown of surly discontent.

"Long?" he growled to the reporter's first question about his length of service. "It don't seem long to me. Thirty-five years ain't long. Besides I'll bet I'm 's limber 's any man half my age."

The reporter replied jocularly that he would not take the bet; for the captain's eye was keen under his gray eyebrows; and though his hand was withered, it did not shake with any weakness of old age; and he had a back as straight and a shoulder as broad as the youngest driver in the service.

It was evident, however, that the captain's temper had not similarly preserved its youth. The reporter decided that the old horse was sulking because he had been turned out to

THE SMOKE - EATERS

pasture; and he began to coax him artfully into speech with questions about the nature of back-drafts, the proper methods of fire-fighting, the use of modern apparatus and the escapades of old "volunteer" days.

Meaghan chafed and squirmed, correcting the mistakes of affected ignorance with a contempt that was gradually mollified by the diligence with which the reporter made his pretence of taking copious notes.

"Jump?" he replied to a question about the use of life-nets. "Jump nothin'. No fireman ever jumps into a life-net. He falls. He drops. An' when he hits it, he's sittin' down. Mary there could tell y' about jumpin'. She knows how to do it."

The reporter looked around to see a slim young woman standing in the kitchen doorway with her hand on the knob, listening to the conversation. She gave a little gasp of confusion and shut the door on her blushes.

"How does *she* know?" he smiled.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

“ ‘Cause she done it,” Meaghan said. “ She dropped out o’ the fourth story window o’ the Adiron Flats, as plumb as an apple off a tree. An’ she followed d’rections when she did it. An’ that’s what saved her life.”

The reporter frowned quizzically. “ The Adiron Flats? She’s your daughter, isn’t she? ”

“ No, sir,” Meaghan said. “ She’s not my daughter, an’ I don’t know whose daughter she is.”

The newspaper man laughed in a way that was intended to be ingratiating.

“ I give it up,” he said, as if it were a conundrum.

Meaghan looked out of the window at the rusty fire-escapes across the court. He had an expression of mingled hesitation and distaste. “ Suppose I got it into the newspapers again,” he said at last. “ It might find some of her folks.”

THE SMOKE - EATERS

“ Sure to,” the reporter said, with ready conviction.

Meaghan looked worried. He glanced around at the closed door. “ She’s a thoroughbred — er I’m no judge o’ breedin.’ She’s too good fer this stable.”

“ Yes? ”

The captain glanced at him, and swallowed. “ I s’pose yuh’ll make a d—— picture spiel of it,” he said, wrathfully, “ an’ make a fool o’ me.”

The reporter laughed. “ Oh, I don’t know.”

“ I do,” Meaghan growled. He fell back on a thoughtful silence again. “ It might make trouble between her an’ Gallegher,” he muttered. “ An’ then again it mightn’t. . . . She’s got things comin’ to her, I guess — er ought to. She’s got a right to know who her folks are, anyway.”

The reporter was discreet enough to say nothing.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Meaghan turned on him. "Well, I s'pose I got to do it. D'yuh know when the 'Adiron' was burned?"

"No. Not precisely."

"Huh! It was the twenty-second o' January, eighteen years ago — about two o'clock in the mornin'."

The reporter drew his chair up to the table. The captain relit his cigar.

"We were slow gettin' there. The streets were hub-deep — in snow. Besides the box'd been rung in late. An' anyway the ol' Adiron was a fire-trap — a reg'lar house o' cards. She went up in a puff."

He puckered his eyes reflectively. "The windows were full o' people — yellin' — an' jumpin', some o' them. I thought at first it was bundles o' beddin' they were throwin' out — till I heard one hit the sidewalk. . . . Blaze must 've been comin' up the light-well an' th' elevator-shaft. They'd been cut off from the fire-escapes at the back, an' all

THE SMOKE - EATERS

crowded to the front windows when they woke up—what did wake up. . . . It kept us busy with the ladders, pickin' them off an' gettin' them down. Some places we had to break in the windows an' carry them out. A lot o' them must 've been suffocated in bed. I don't remember how many. We saved about thirty, all told. Well—''

He puffed up a cloud of smoke and eyed it. "I was haulin' up a scalin'-ladder in the third story window, when the glass blew out o' the window up over me—the window I was headin' for. I sized that up as local—an open door somewhere—an' reached the ladder over to the sill next, to the right, an' went up an' lifted an ol' dame out o' there, an' passed her down to Rooney—but it was gettin' so thick I couldn't stan' it long enough to get into the back rooms, an' I had to crawfish. . . . I was sittin' on the sill, tryin' to get wind between the puffs o' smoke from down below when the whole d—— room

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

went off like yuh'd put a match to th' oven of a gas-stove, an' I dropped down the ladder an' hung there with my eyebrows scorched off me, an' as blind as a bat — fer the time bein'. . . .

“ Well, that's where I was when I heard a youngster screamin' somewheres — an' got the water out o' my eyes to see a little girl hangin' over the sill o' the window right up over the one I'd dropped down out o'. I got the smoke out o' my pipes 's soon's I could, an' braced my feet against the wall, an' sang out 'Hi! Hi, there, sissy! See me here!' An' she piped up 'Yes' like a trump. 'Well,' I says, 'get out on that window-sill, an' turn over an' drop down here. Come along now.' An' she says, 'All right, sir — ' an' she did it! Jus' sat out on the sill an' turned over on her face, an' let herself slide, an' dropped twelve feet on to me with just a little grunt when I grabbed her. She didn't weigh no more than a wet cat, anyway.

THE SMOKE - EATERS

. . . Mebbe she didn't understan' where she was — thought I was standin' on the ground er somethin.' . . . But it was thoroughbred all right. You jus' try askin' people to jump like that. Try askin' a drownin' man to turn over an' dive! ”

The reporter waited. “ How did you get down with her? ”

“ Down with her? . . . Oh! . . . I went down to the foot o' the ladder an' the boys brought up a life-net, an' I dropped in it with her. She'd fainted — er been jarred bad — er somethin', so I handed her over to an ambulance doctor, an' they took her to the hospital.”

“ Yes? ”

The captain nodded. “ Yep, an' that was the queer part about it. Nex' day there was a lot in the papers about her. Seems her parents hadn't got out, and nobody that *had* didn't seem to know who she was, er who her folks were, or where she'd come from.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

A man by the name o' Dillon 'd rented that flat, so the super'tendent said, but who Dillon was he didn't know. Come from out o' town, he said. Chicago, he thought. They'd just moved in, an' there wasn't anythin' but burned bricks lef' to identify them by. An' the papers said she didn't know her own name, an' was gen'rally half-witted altogether — ”

“ That was funny,” the reporter put in.

“ Funny! It looked so much like a lie it made me that darn mad I went right up to the ward to see her. An' I'll be everlastin'ly scorched if she knew me, er remembered jumpin'— er remembered anythin'. She might as well been born that same mornin' fer all she remembered about what'd happened before. Yes'r. . . . Doctor said the thing 'd gone to her head— hurt her brain— an' it had, an' it hadn't. When I took her— 'cause no one else wanted her— an' me an' th' ol' woman hadn't none of our

THE SMOKE - EATERS

own — an' sent her to school, she learned like a prize-winner. There was nothin' wrong with her head that way. But she never learned what she'd forgotten — an' that was all she'd ever knowed before that fire."

"Queer," the reporter said.

"Queer as h——," the captain agreed. "The doctor tol' me not to bother her about it. An' I haven't, neither. But whenever I've got the chanct I've tried to hunt up her folk — made a run up to Chicago an' looked up a half-dozen Dillons without lettin' her know — an' things like that. . . . After awhile we settled down together an' since th' ol' woman died, I ain't mentioned it to any one. . . . But she's got things comin' to her, somewheres. The Adiron was a swell flat house. They must 've had the price — to live there."

The reporter looked up from his paper to ask: "Can you let me have her photo?"

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

“ Yes'r; I can,” Meaghan said. “ Mary! . . . Mary!” he called, in the voice of a company foreman.

She opened the door.

“ Bring me that last picture o' yours.”

There was a silence. The reporter did not look around. She asked, huskily: “ What for? ”

The captain ran an impatient hand through his hair. “ Well, I got the time now,” he said, “ an' I want to have another try at findin' out — what I couldn't find out before. Y' ought to know who yer people are. There may be things comin' to yuh — ”

“ I don't want them,” she cut in.

“ Yuh don't know but what yer relations — ”

“ I haven't any. They didn't want *me*, and I don't want them. Are you tired of me? ” she cried.

The reporter coolly noted the color of her hair, her level eyebrows, her clear gray

THE SMOKE - EATERS

eyes. The captain got up from his chair. " Mary! " he said, gruffly.

" Well," she protested, " I don't want to go away. I don't want to go away to strangers. . . . And I won't. I just won't," she cried, defiantly. He frowned. " Aw, daddy," she said, putting her arms about him, " what's the use? Aren't we just all right enough? Aren't we just happy now that you're home all the time, and everything comfy? "

The reporter settled back and watched as if he were in an orchestra chair at a stage tragedy. The girl's face reminded him of Ellen Terry's; and it was as mobile as an actress's, changing with every change of her voice.

The captain took her by the arm and held her off from him. " Don't yuh think Gallegher's got a right to know who he's marryin'? "

She flushed up indignantly at once. " If

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

I'm not good enough for Captain Gallagher as I *am*, why — he can do without me! ”

“ But why? Why? ” the captain argued. “ What's the matter with findin' out? It ain't goin' to do y' any harm, is it? ”

“ Well, ” she said, “ it might make a difference. And if things were different, they might be — different. ” She smiled ruefully at her own inconsequence. “ And I don't want them to be different. ”

“ What's the matter with them bein' better? ”

“ They couldn't be, ” she laughed.

He patted her on the shoulder. “ Run away an' get the pi'ture, now. That's a good girl. We're goin' to put it in the papers. ”

Her face went tragic at once. “ Yes, ” she cried, “ you'll put it in the papers and some ugly old woman that I never saw before, she'll come and take me away in a carriage to — to I don't know where. And if they

THE SMOKE - EATERS

give me money and — and dresses — Ned'll be afraid of me, and you'll be ashamed to come and see me, and — and I don't know what all!" She blinked tearfully. "I knew you were thinking about it from what you said last night, and it kept me awake worrying me until it gave me a headache. And I wasn't to be worried about it." She sobbed: "I — I feel as if I'd just go crazy about it."

She put her hand up to her head. He caught her by the elbow. "Mary! . . . Mary! . . . Don't go on like that. It's all right. It's all right. No one can take y' away, if yuh don't want to go."

"Can't they?" she cried, fiercely, drawing away from him. "I know! I dreamed about it last night. They *took* me. They had a lawyer — " There was a sound of a passing carriage in the street. "Listen," she whispered, her hand shaking at her mouth. "That was it! Listen!"

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Meaghan uttered an oath of alarm and pressed her face against his shoulder. "That'll do," he said, hoarsely. "We won't put it in the papers. We don't want the photo. We won't let yuh go away. Here!" He turned to reach out a hand for the reporter's notes. "Gi' me those. . . . Here, yuh can tear up what we were goin' to print." He thrust the sheets into her hand and shut her stiffened fingers on them. "S-sh, girl," he hushed her, patting her on the shoulder. "All right now. I'll never say another word about it."

Her shaking and sobbing subsided gradually. When she looked up from his shoulder at last, she was trying to smile through her tears. "That's the way," he encouraged her, stroking her hair.

She kissed him prettily.

"Better now?" he asked, and she nodded.

She winked at the sheets of shorthand.

"Aren't they funny?" she laughed, in a

THE SMOKE - EATERS

voice that was still trembling. She turned to the reporter with an uncertain smile. "I'm sorry," she apologized, "to — to —"

"Oh, that's all right," he said, taking up his hat. "Too bad to have worried you."

She looked from him to the notes and back again. "And you — you won't say anything about it?"

"Certainly not," he promised. "I'll consider it strictly 'not for publication.'"

"Thank you," she said, deeply, and went over to him with the sheets. He took them from her and tore them up, reddening slightly at the frank kindness of the look with which she met him. "It was so much work, too," she said, meaningly, "to — to get it."

He laughed. "Oh, I'm used to that."

She embarrassed him with the smiling interest of her gaze. He looked down at the hat in his hands. "I'm afraid I'll have to — to hurry away."

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

“ Good-by,” she said, “ and thank you.” She held out her hand to meet his with a firm clasp of good nature.

He stammered: “ Con — congratulate Captain Gallegher for me. I know you’ll be happy.”

She beamed her assurance of that. “ And so will daddy. . . . Good-by.” She smiled him out. “ Won’t you, daddy? Eh, daddy? ” she cried, gaily, and threw her arms about his neck.

“ I s’pose,” he said, with a pretence of surliness. “ I’m not fit for anythin’ but to play gran’pa. I’ll spen’ the rest o’ my life sittin’ in the park with a baby carriage — ”

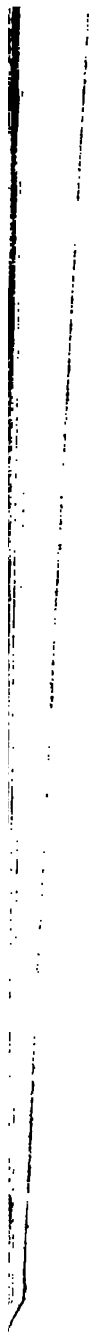
She clapped her hand over his gray mustache, and screamed: “ Daddy! ”

THE END.



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